I Am Deleting the Blog (slatestarcodex.com)

2252 points by perditus 21 hours ago | hide | past | web | favorite | 1355 comments

add comment

kerkeslager 14 hours ago [–]

Damn. I've been reading Slate Star Codex for a long time, and he's always been one of the most insightful voices on the internet. I'm really sorry to see him go.

After reading this, I looked up NYT's policy of using real names, and it turns out this isn't the worst time that the NY Times has done this[1].

I've long said that if you want to know who an organization serves, see where its money comes from. The NY Times gets 60% of its money from subscriptions, but it also gets 30% of its money from advertisers[2]. Keep in mind that subscribers can be hard to court, and losing one advertiser is a bigger chunk of money, so the NY Times is likely to be disproportionately influenced by the 30% of their income that comes from advertisers.

We're better off with organizations who receive their money from donations. I have been constantly impressed with the reporting of Mother Jones[3] and ProPublica[4] and would encourage you to both read and donate.

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/sep/26/new-york-times...

[2] https://dashboards.trefis.com/no-login-required/5gNimvTR/New...

[3] https://www.motherjones.com/

[4] https://www.propublica.org/

reply

kopochameleon 7 hours ago [–]

Interestingly in https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/style/women-gaming-stream... from today they seem to possibly withhold discoverable legal names:

> (The streamers did not provide their legal names to The New York Times. In years past, women gamers who have spoken out against the industry using their legal names have been subjected to further harassment, hacking and doxxing.)

reply

throwaway894345 7 hours ago [–]

One wonders what criteria the Times must be using to determine that it's worth putting Scott at credible risk for further harassment but not women gamers. Is the Times really more sympathetic to gamers than psychiatrists or bloggers? That seems like an unlikely policy, but what else could explain it? I'm stumped.

reply

doubleunplussed 5 hours ago [–]

Women gamers compared to *white male* psychiatrist bloggers who *occasionally criticise feminism*? Yes.

There's no mystery here. Scott belongs to a class of people for whom sympathy is not culturally trendy at the moment.

reply

tailrecursion 5 hours ago [–]

Do the people who are downvoting this comment believe that sympathy for Scott's class of people IS trendy at the moment? What's the objection to the comment.

reply

sololipsist 4 hours ago [–]

Welcome to hacker news. I hope your first day is pleasant.

reply

bsanr2 3 hours ago [–]

Contrary to popular belief, HN's demographic is not immune to knee-jerk hostility triggered by the notion of a concept merely existing, wherever one might come down when discussing it.

reply

taneq 3 hours ago [–]

Also there's a minority who treat the downvote button as a disagree button.

reply

young_unixer 4 hours ago [–]

> Is the Times really more sympathetic to gamers than psychiatrists or bloggers?

It's more sympathetic to women than men. They won't directly tell you: "We protect women but not men", but that's the implicit policy of many institutions, especially mainstream media.

reply

kps 6 hours ago [–]

> *what else could explain it? I'm stumped.*

That's irony, right? It's hard to tell these days.

reply

throwaway894345 6 hours ago [–]

The only alternative I can imagine is so uncharitable and goes against everything an institution as famously progressive as the Times stands for that I dare not utter its name.

reply

▲ rndgermandude 2 hours ago [–]

You're looking for the word "sexism".

Discrimination comes both as "negative" and "positive" (both of which are usually in fact negative). E.g. people saying people of a certain ethnic background are better at math - on the surface a "positive" thing to say, but in fact fostering certain stereotypes and stereotyping people usually hurt a lot of people.

reply

▲ kps 6 hours ago [–]

Walter Duranty has entered the chat

reply

▲ at_a_remove 7 hours ago [–]

Nothing like selective enforcement of the rules as your politics so moves you.

reply

▲ alecbenzer 13 hours ago [–]

The implication being that the NYT wants to use real names to drive clicks and appease advertisers?

reply

▲ catacombs 12 hours ago [–]

> The implication being that the NYT wants to use real names to drive clicks and appease advertisers?

This shows a lack of how journalism works. Using real names isn't to "drive clicks" and "appease advertisers." It's to add credibility to a story.

Think about it: Does a furniture business advertising in the local paper care whether the victim of a shooting is named in a piece? Sure, the owner might know the victim, but that doesn't mean the business will determine its expenditures based on names.

reply

▲ pdonis 8 hours ago [–]

> Using real names isn't to "drive clicks" and "appease advertisers." It's to add credibility to a story.

If the NYT actually thinks they need to use the real name of the author of Slate Star Codex to add credibility to a story about the blog, they're delusional.

I think it's much more likely that they simply don't care about the valid personal concerns of people they write about.

reply

▲ foob4r 7 hours ago [–]

Regardless, revealing someone's real name is orthogonal to clicks or ad revenue.

reply

▲ rndgermandude 1 hour ago [–]

It's actually not. People in general like "good stories" and will read and share them more. Adding "credibility" will drive the perception as a "good" story and therefore to some degree clicks as well.

reply

▲ andy_ppp 6 hours ago [–]

Why did the journalist search out the real name which is clearly *difficult* and then not talk to his interviewee about his name being released; because he knew it was immoral.

reply

▲ pdonis 6 hours ago [–]

Depends on who's clicking and who the advertisers are.

reply

▲ crazypython 11 hours ago [–]

Well, in that case, the journalists should adapt and give credibility through pseudonymity.

reply

▲ catacombs 11 hours ago [–]

Which is possible through the use of other sources. But it depends on the situation. A pseudonym is appropriate for victims of sex crimes and exploitation.

reply

▲ Fnoord 11 hours ago [–]

Anonymity and/or pseudonym are appropriate in certain situations. In this situation, you have a source you know which is credible (you know their name), and they ask you not to publish their name. In such a case, it is standard journalist ethics in The Netherlands to not disclose the name. Sex crimes and exploitation are two (good) examples of such, but there are other examples as well. Consider for example a whistle blower, a (former) member of a cult, or -to put it generally- someone who can, realistically, be threatened when their real name is released. Such is the very case here. I am in awe that The New York Times does not adhere to the very same principles as the Dutch media do, although I am aware that the vow has been broken here as well (such as in the case of Rob Oudkerk and Parool's Heleen van Royen).

reply

▲ catacombs 10 hours ago [–]

> In such a case, it is standard journalist ethics in The Netherlands to not disclose the name.

That's in The Netherlands, a country with different laws and regulations for the press.

This case is specific to the United States, with its own rules and protections.

reply

▲ sigstoat 10 hours ago [–]

there's nothing stopping the NYT from being more ethical than US law requires them to be. and they regularly argue that current US law isn't sufficiently ethical (though perhaps not on this issue).

reply

▲ Fnoord 7 hours ago [–]

I was talking about an aspect of the ethical standard for journalism in The Netherlands; not the law.

reply

▲ tc313 10 hours ago [–]

I think the person you are responding to was trying to figure out what kerkeslager's point was, rather than stating his own conclusion. I am a bit confused myself as to what the connection is between name-publishing policies and sources of funding.

reply

▲ Nasrudith 11 hours ago [–]

It is a pretty damn dubious measure of credibility and it has already failed when suggested for civility.

I am honestly starting to think real name policies are just about hating anominity at this point.

reply

▲ catacombs 11 hours ago [–]

If you value your privacy, don't speak to reporters and take every protection to protect your identity. This thinking goes from the basement dweller to the billionaire.

However, if your information is revealed, don't be shocked when someone approaches you with that information because you didn't cover your tracks.

reply

▲ FeepingCreature 3 hours ago [–]

We're not surprised, we're just disappointed.

reply

▲ msla 11 hours ago [–]

> Using real names isn't to "drive clicks" and "appease advertisers." It's to add credibility to a story.

What about not revealing sources? Didn't journalists used to go to jail for that one?

reply

▲ catacombs 11 hours ago [–]

Correct. Judith Miller is an example. However, her information turned out to be inaccurate. But she wasn't willing to oust her source.

Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, of Watergate fame, famously refused to reveal their FBI source, Deep Throat, for decades. Of course, they didn't go to jail.

reply

▲ kerkeslager 13 hours ago [–]

Hm, I don't know if I'd draw the cause/effect so directly.

To me, these are two separate problems: 1) NYT doxxes sources, 2) NYT serves advertisers rather than readers. There might be some relation between these two problems but I don't personally have enough information to conclude that.

I didn't make that clear in my previous post, my apologies. No implication was intended.

reply

▲ stupendousyappi 12 hours ago [–]

I have a hard time seeing how the statistic that the Times receives twice as much money from readers as from advertisers is evidence that the NYT "serves advertisers rather than readers". I think that probably puts them in the top 10% of media outlets in terms of how financially independent of advertising they are.

reply

▲ vlthr 12 hours ago [–]

I take the point about subscribers being hard to count to mean that even though most of the money comes from subscribers, each individual subscriber doesn't have much leverage or bandwidth to communicate their desires to NYT. On the flip side, each individual advertiser commands some sizeable chunk of NYT's revenue as leverage.

reply

▲ catalogia 10 hours ago [–]

The NYTs is also known to hassle subscribers who want to unsubscribe. The only reason a company would do that is because they know some people will give up, effectively disenfranchising them.

reply

▲ quickpost123 10 hours ago [–]

Anecdotally, it took ten minutes to unsusbscribe this morning (going through an online chat service rather than calling them), which is much longer than it should take, but worth it. It may be worse now due to this incident.

reply

▲ vinay_ys 6 hours ago [–]

I got through their virtual agent and reached a human agent who decided to transfer me once she got to know I'm asking for cancellation. I got this response "Please wait one moment while I transfer you to an account specialist." Now I'm just waiting after another automated response "Sorry our wait times are longer than expected. Thank you for your patience." This really sucks.

reply

▲ catalogia 7 hours ago [–]

I think it's beyond the pale that they require you to chat with a sales representative to cancel a subscription. To reiterate, the only reason a company would do this is because they know it will suppress the number of people successfully unsubscribing. The NYTs is using the same sort of strategy commercial gyms are infamous for, albeit in a less extreme form.

Contrast it with Netflix's model of unsubscription, which you can do at any time with a single click. They've even gone as far as automatically cancelling inactive accounts. Netflix is obviously a company with confidence in their own product, so they don't resort to any dark patterns in their unsubscription process like the NYTs does.

reply

▲ stupendousyappi 6 hours ago [–]

Netflix is obsessed with data. Easy cancellation lets them define a much more accurate loss function for the AI they eventually want to run their whole business for them.

reply

▲ quickpost123 7 hours ago [–]

Strongly agree. My original plan on unsubscribing was to come back if they blinked on SlateStarCodex (everyone makes mistakes), but after being made to jump through these extra hoops, I'm through with this company.

reply

▲ kerkeslager 12 hours ago [–]

I think *any* amount of money from advertisers is toxic.

There's a fundamental disconnect between the mission of a news organization and getting paid to lie (which is, fundamentally, what advertising is). You cannot accept ad dollars and be an effective purveyor of truth.

reply

▲ philh 9 hours ago [–]

> getting paid to lie (which is, fundamentally, what advertising is).

Not fundamentally. A lot of advertising may be well be outright lying, or close enough as makes no difference.

But... I used to go by a shop named "Cards Galore", it had its name in reasonably sized letters hanging over the sidewalk, and then when I wanted to buy a card I knew where I could get one. Nothing lying about that. I think there's a lot of advertising which is like that.

Something weaker might be true, like "large-scale advertising will inevitably lead to large-scale lying". But "advertising is fundamentally lying" is not true.

reply

▲ kelnos 7 hours ago [–]

While there's a good amount of advertising that's truthful, I think it's safe to label all (or at least nearly all) advertising as emotional manipulation, and on those grounds I try to avoid advertising.

Companies toying with my psychology in order to get me to buy something from them... well, that doesn't sit well with me.

reply

▲ kerkeslager 7 hours ago [–]

I don't really consider labeling a business to be advertising, though. That's like if I go to Wikipedia and see the Wikipedia logo--it's just showing me where I am.

Internet advertising is pretty much all lying. Even when what an ad says is factual, they're not telling you the whole truth, they're telling you a partial truth that leaves out pieces of information which they know would be relevant to you--that's a lie because their intent is to deceive you.

And by the way, I do get it: in a lot of businesses you have to advertise because your competitors are advertising. Advertising is a blight on society that infects everyone: opting out of advertising isn't a viable option without major sacrifice. I'd like to see a future where we all agree to stop advertising and rely on consumer-reports-style reviewers to obtain unbiased product information.

reply

▲ osmarks 9 hours ago [–]

SlateStarCodex itself used to have advertisers on it, and the adverts seemed pretty much fine - just banners and descriptions from a bunch of sponsors, which were pretty relevant to the blog and, I guess, the people likely to visit it. Advertisement doesn't have to *lie*, it can just provide useful information you haven't seen yet. Although it generally does.

reply

▲ kerkeslager 7 hours ago [–]

Advertising is like a stopped clock: even when they present some part of the truth, it's not information, because you don't know if it's true or not. You have to obtain information via other means.

And even when they make statements of fact, it's still lying because they leave things out with the intent to deceive.

reply

▲ TeMPOraL 7 hours ago [–]

> *Advertisement doesn't have to lie, it can just provide useful information you haven't seen yet. Although it generally does.*

That's the crux, though. It technically doesn't have to be like this, but it almost always is - so "advertising is a bunch of consumer-hostile lies" is a more accurate generalization than "advertising informs people".

reply

▲ notatoad 6 hours ago [–]

>NYT doxxes sources

not to defend the NYTimes here, they're definitely in the wrong. but doxxing a source for an article and doxxing the subject of an article are very different things. The subject of this article is not a "source".

reply

WalterSear 6 hours ago [–]

I understood article subject to be social groups during Covid.

reply

LoSboccacc 6 hours ago [–]

the object of the article is an intentionally anonymous blog tho

reply

kelnos 7 hours ago [–]

I think it's equally plausible that the NYT believes that doxxing sources does serve their readers. Perhaps a significant portion of the NYT's paying subscribers are against anonymity in sources? Who knows.

Not saying this is a good thing, but I think assuming that this "policy" is there to get advertising dollars is weird. Why would advertisers care?

reply

gwbas1c 12 hours ago [–]

I think it's best to hear from NYT about why they strictly only use real names.

reply

catacombs 12 hours ago [–]

Factual accuracy is the cornerstone of the profession.

In reporting out a story, it is the journalist's responsibility to obtain factual and verifiable information. People are the center of the story, and using their real names adds credibility to the story.

Now, there are circumstances where reporters use pseudonyms for sources -- mainly to protect victims of sex crimes -- or anonymous sources entirely. The latter is constantly debated among journalists. However, the consensus is using anonymous sources is necessary when all other avenues of getting someone on the record is exhausted or the story is so explosive that people close to the information are willing to shed light on an issue so long as their name is not used in print, mostly from fear of retribution, which is more common than you think.

reply

gwern 12 hours ago [–]

Using anonymous sources to relay secret information like government insiders is very different from public pseudonymous writers. 'Scott Alexander' is of interest only as 'Scott Alexander'; he is famous for writing as 'Scott Alexander'; if you want to find criticism of Scott Alexander, you will find it by asking people about 'Scott Alexander'; and he blogs about general topics with reference to publicly verifiable things like scientific research, as opposed to focusing solely on his anecdotal experience; what does knowing his real name add or let a journalist verify? Does it somehow let you verify that he does in fact blog at SSC...? (Yes, he sometimes talks about his psychiatric patients, but like all psychiatrists, he blends and tweaks stories to protect his patients, and knowing his real name is John Smith gives you no more way of verifying said stories than when they were written by 'Scott Alexander'.)

reply

zaroth 11 hours ago [–]

It's even worse than not having his name being irrelevant. By forcing the issue the NYT has now become the story. Whatever piece the NYT originally wanted to write is now subsumed by their own actions.

I am not a journalist, but I have to imagine that "don't become the story" is pretty high up on the list of journalistic ideals.

When it's someone the NYT feels they want to protect, they will go to any length, even jail time, to protect them. It's very hard for me not to conclude ill intent on behalf of the NYT in wanting to draw fire toward SSC based on Scott's ideology. Asking the question "why this story now" in the current hyper-partisan and cancel-rage environment brings me to one obvious conclusion even though Scott himself doesn't make such a leap.

reply

jsjohnst 9 hours ago [–]

> doesn't make such a leap

While he doesn't directly state it, I got the impression that he felt the motive for doxxing him was that very reason. I may be reading between the lines too much, but I got that impression none the less.

reply

Paul-ish 10 hours ago [–]

By using his real name, readers who know that name can get more out of the article. Imagine if he is actually a state senator, or a minor celebrity. The reporter here isn't doing the difficult calculus of "does revealing his name do more good than harm" but is instead relying on company policy. Alternatively the reporter has done the calculus and are using policy as a shield. "Nothing personal, it's just business"

reply

gwern 7 hours ago [–]

The reporter knows perfectly well that Scott is not actually a state senator, and that he is a minor celebrity... as 'Scott Alexander'.

reply

stickfigure 9 hours ago [–]

Let's change the setting to Weimar Germany, and the subject is a prominent Jewish blogger. Still think it's ok to expose his real identity? "Just business"?

reply

catacombs 11 hours ago [–]

> what does knowing his real name add or let a journalist verify? Does it somehow let you verify that he does in fact blog at SSC...?

Correct. Anyone, whether it's an individual or group of people, can be "Scott Alexander."

What does it add? It makes the story more credible under scrutiny.

reply

pdonis 8 hours ago [–]

> *Anyone, whether it's an individual or group of people, can be "Scott Alexander."*

So what? The story isn't about who Scott Alexander is. The story is about the blog. Anyone can go to the website and read the blog (or at least they could before the NYT pulled this screwup). If the NYT wants their story about the blog to be credible, they just need to tell the truth about what the blog says.

reply

catacombs 8 hours ago [–]

> So what? The story isn't about who Scott Alexander is. The story is about the blog.

It's about the blog and its author. It's like writing about a controversial book without any mention of the author. That's not possible.

reply

philwelch 3 hours ago [–]

Funny you should mention that:

> A Warning is a 2019 book-length exposé of the Trump administration, anonymously authored by someone described as a "senior Trump administration official". It is a follow-up to an anonymous op-ed published by the New York Times in September 2018.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Warning_(book)

reply

zestyping 6 hours ago [–]

Is it necessary to reveal J. K. Rowling's real name in order to write an article about her controversial views? I think not.

reply

pdonis 7 hours ago [–]

> *It's about the blog and its author.*

The author's persona on the blog, yes. That doesn't mean the author's real name needs to be revealed.

reply

kelnos 7 hours ago [–]

The author's name is irrelevant to that story, because the story is about the author only insofar is that relates to the blog, which is written under a pseudonym. In fact, it's actively *confusing* to bring anything but the pseudonym into this.

reply

viridian 11 hours ago [–]

I don't follow your logic, maybe I'm missing something. Let's say I publicly claim to be Scott Alexander. The owner of slatestarcodex with the email address scott@slatestarcodex.com also claims to be scott alexander? Doesn't the latter claim carry far more weight? If so, why is the personage relevant?

reply

catacombs 11 hours ago [–]

> Let's say I publicly claim to be Scott Alexander. The owner of slatestarcodex with the email address scott@slatestarcodex.com also claims to be scott alexander? Doesn't the latter claim carry far more weight?

It's just an email address. It could be Scott or it could be someone else. Yes, common sense would say it's Scott, but the reporter would have to still prove it's him. If you claim to be Scott, too, that will also need to be checked out.

Many people will take that information and run, but if you're writing for a national outlet, where accurate reporting is everything, your editor will say, "Yes, that might be Scott, but how do you know? What proof can you provide? If we get called out for a fact error, can you refute that claim?

reply

kyle-rb 10 hours ago [–]

How does providing a last name make his authorship of the blog more credible though? And how does publishing it help? I don't see how the reporter or the readers have any way of verifying that the blogger of SSC has a last name matching the one from the article.

reply

viridian 8 hours ago [–]

Forgive me for the repetition you are about to see, I'm attempting to apply a bit of formality to the reasoning in question:

The Scott who posts at slatestarcodex.com is the Scott who is scott@slatestarcodex.com.

Therefore, the material Scott when attempting to pin down Scott in the context of slatestarcodex is scott@slatestarcodex.com.

Human X out in meat space could or could not be Scott, but that much is immaterial, as scott@slatestarcodex.com has been shown to be directly linked to Scott Alexander the blogger as a means of contacting him.

Thus I ask: what better proof could one have that scott@slatestarcodex.com is Scott Alexander, author of slatestarcodex?

reply

catacombs 8 hours ago [–]

> Thus I ask: what better proof could one have that scott@slatestarcodex.com is Scott Alexander, author of slatestarcodex?

From an editor's point of view, that's not enough, assuming the reporter has not done any form of reporting through interviews, public records and other methods.

reply

Smaug123 6 hours ago [–]

I think you've missed the point. The point is that even if Scott were in fact a conglomerate of twenty people, Scott's writing is still the same, and is what draws people to the blog, and is ultimately why there's any story to be written at all. Nobody, but nobody, cares about the actual human originator(s) of the posts; it's the persona who matters.

reply

catacombs 4 hours ago [–]

I have not missed the point.

The story is about the blog, yes, but a portion deals with the _person_ or _people_ behind it. And that's important.

reply

csa 9 hours ago [–]

So is it safe to assume that the NYT always refers to Jon Stewart as Jon Leibovitz? Mark Twain as Samuel Clemens?

Maybe one could make an argument for a stage name or pen name being different (and there are many of those), but could Scott Alexander not also be considered a pen name?

reply

HideousKojima 6 hours ago [–]

Having worked in a tv newsroom before doing IT (so I could see all the reporters' real names), roughly 90% of the reporters used pseudonyms for their professional work. Not sure about the rate for print/internet media, but I'm sure it's still pretty high.

reply

jerkstate 11 hours ago [–]

NYT frequently uses anonymous sources, even in cases where it doesn't seem to be necessary. Search for "sources familiar with the matter" +site:nytimes.com for dozens of examples per month.

reply

yorwba 10 hours ago [–]

The difference is presumably that those sources keep feeding them interesting information, so they have to respect their anonymity to avoid jeopardizing that relationship. Scott is only good for one story, so they can treat him however they want.

reply

jbay808 11 hours ago [–]

The Globe and Mail, a newspaper that I have a fair amount of respect for, frequently changes names to protect sources, the subjects of articles and interviewees who aren't willing to be named. They say in the article that the name has been changed. It doesn't detract from the article at all.

reply

pdonis 8 hours ago [–]

> *In reporting out a story, it is the journalist's responsibility to obtain factual and verifiable information.*

Yes, like the fact that a website called "Slate Star Codex" exists and particular posts in it say what the article says they say.

There is no reason why a story about the blog needs to include the real name of the author, when that real name isn't even revealed anywhere on the blog. The story is about the blog.

reply

kelnos 7 hours ago [–]

> *In reporting out a story, it is the journalist's responsibility to obtain factual and verifiable information. People are the center of the story, and using their real names adds credibility to the story.*

IMO that doesn't apply to a situation like this. By definition, whoever answers email sent to the address on the SSC blog is the author of the blog. It doesn't matter if that person's "name" is Scott Alexander or Santa Claus or SillyBob5319. The piece the NYT is writing is about the *blog*, not about the specific, identifiable person who writes it. Knowing who that person is does not add credibility to the story; the credibility is already asserted by the fact that the person who controls the email address behind the blog is talking about it.

To your point about "verifiable information": the only verification needed by a hypothetical reader of this perhaps-never-to-be-published NYT article would be 1) visit the blog; 2) find a contact email; 3) send email asking "were those actually your words quote in this NYT article?" The person's name is irrelevant.

reply

205guy 3 hours ago [–]

I think what you’re missing is that news stories like this are designed to connect the abstract (ideas in a blog) with real people. Many/most newspaper readers are interested in other people, relationships, who is doing what, and personal connections.

The readers don’t care that there is a controversial (or radical or not) blog on the internet, they want to know if anyone important is related to the blog and whether they should try to gain influence with said people or not (by aligning or distancing themselves from said people, depending on their own connections). For example, only if the author is named can they know whether he/she is a reputable practitioner at a prestigious institution (who can thereby give influence or be vulnerable to controversy), or maybe just a random doctor in a rural town (can be safely ignored).

So for people who rely on networks of other people, such as many political, corporate, and governmental sub-cultures, the NYT gains credibility by naming names and placing people in context. In other words, the NYT is a mainstream product and service, it’s interests are perhaps not most aligned with the pseudo-anonymous world of tech and ideas that the SSC blog and HN itself appeal to and cater to.

reply

zepto 11 hours ago [–]

Does this mean they don’t care if there is a reasonable risk of retribution as long as they get the person on record?

reply

catacombs 11 hours ago [–]

Reporters will try to get the person on record, but in the end, it's up to the source.

If he or she agrees to go on record, they should understand the potential risks.

It would behoove the reporter to lay out the options. Tricking someone to say something without knowing whether he or she is on the record is a big no-no.

reply

kerkeslager 11 hours ago [–]

Ehhh, I don't think this accurately represents the situation with "on the record" or "off the record":

1. When a journalist identifies themself as a journalist, all conversations thereafter are assumed to be on the record unless specified otherwise.

2. Statements can't be made off the record after the fact--you have to say something is off the record *before* you say it for it to be considered off the record.

3. This is only journalist tradition, not law. Even if you say something is off the record, there's no real incentive for a journalist not to just publish it anyway, except their integrity. Journalists can and do break this rule, especially when they disagree with the person whose words they are reporting.

reply

catacombs 11 hours ago [–]

> Ehhh, I don't think this accurately represents the situation with "on the record" or "off the record"

I am not tying SSC's situation with the general theme of on- and off-the-record.

I will say your explanation of the difference is spot on.

reply

CydeWeys 11 hours ago [–]

That's what gets me in this situation.

Publishing the article with his full name if he's OK with that is an acceptable outcome.

Binning the article entirely if he's not OK with publishing his full name is also an acceptable outcome (though honestly it's a waste of time on all parties and it would have been better to make this constraint clear up front).

But publishing the article anyway and releasing his full name against his will, when he's the primary source for the story? That seems like a no-no. Interestingly, this hasn't happened yet, and seems like it may never at this rate.

reply

zozbot234 11 hours ago [–]

The "constraint" against revealing Scott's real name has *always* been clear up-front to people who were familiar with his work, even on-line. If it wasn't clear enough to this NYT reporter, that's their problem.

reply

zepto 11 hours ago [–]

Ok, but is it reasonable for people to understand the potential risks?

I don’t see any reporting on the dangers of talking to reporters. Where is the NYT piece on what happens to people after they have been linked to something in the news?

I think that given Scott Alexander’s experience, ‘don’t talk to reporters, ever’, is as sound advice as ‘don’t talk to the police without an attorney’.

reply

catacombs 11 hours ago [–]

> I don’t see any reporting on the dangers of talking to reporters.

There are plenty of resources on how to handle talking with a reporter.

One thing I would suggest learning the difference between going on- and off-the-record and speaking on background.

> Where is the NYT piece on what happens to people after they have been linked to something in the news?

Here's a free one: Harvey Weinstein's victims. Despite them coming out about his abusive behaviors, his attorneys and henchman are going after them.

reply

zepto 11 hours ago [–]

Where are these ‘plenty of resources’?

The Weinstein case seems to tell us nothing about the general risk of talking to reporters even though it is a data point.

It sounds like you are in full agreement with me otherwise though.

“Talking to reporters is very dangerous. Never do so without extensive study of the available resources.”

reply

wutbrodo 11 hours ago [–]

The policy doesn't even seem to be very consistently applied. There are a couple excerpts from articles floating around that happily use pseudonyms for, eg, one of the Chapo podcast hosts.

reply

SilasX 10 hours ago [–]

Someone started a Twitter thread to compile examples where the NYT reported about someone using their pseudonym:

https://twitter.com/hradzka/status/1275460707069210624

reply

wutbrodo 9 hours ago [–]

Wow, this is egregious. I already didn't have any respect for the NYT, but I'm surprised that a writer of theirs would lie so flagrantly about being chained by bureaucracy.

reply

rsj_hn 5 hours ago [–]

The NYTimes is filled with anonymous sources as well as pseudonymous sources -- look at many articles about Banksy.

This is just a hit on someone the reporter viewed as not sufficiently an ally in the culture war.

reply

closeparen 3 hours ago [–]

Generally it's anonymous sources who tell the wild and not-necessarily-true stories that drive clicks. A policy limiting their use is intended to make the publication more sober. But that's supposed to happen by just not printing the story. Outing people who don't want to be outed is something else.

reply

nillium 12 hours ago [–]

Advertisers do not directly care about real names.

What matters is journalistic integrity. We are in a time when reporters are consistently hammered for quoting anonymous sources.

reply

lvh 12 hours ago [–]

An anonymous source seems materially different from a pseudonymous source, especially when that source is being quoted about their enormous body of work.

reply

mlthoughts2018 10 hours ago [–]

It’s multi-faceted. In some cases NYT (or any news org of any prevailing political inclination) might want to expose real names to exercise control or rally people to cancel someone. Other times it might be more mundane, just wanting a better angle for the story or more solid corroborative details.

In the case of SSC I really worry that NYT would be trying to exercise control. They probably like many things written on the blog, but also hate other things like diving into statistics of gender based pay discrimination or statistics of racial motivation in police violence.

These are topics which the modern left (which I’m a million percent a part of) is increasingly pushing out of scope of the Overton window and treating them like they are not allowed to be subject to statistical evidence or neutral discussion.

There is only One Right Thing To Believe about police violence (that is targets blacks and minorities, even if this is simply not supported by data). There is only One Right Thing To Believe about gender-based pay discrimination (the popular notion of “women make 70 cents on the dollar” which is not close to the real effect size, and requires a ton of uncomfortable nuance to discuss properly because of confounding effects of women staying at home more often and choosing to stay home after maternity leave).

I think they want SSC to write about things that comply with their moral narrative, and see doxxing as a way to turn the screws and essentially promote a vague threat that if he writes something controversial about IQ or sexism or income inequality or whatever, and it doesn’t stick to liberal talking points, they can do a damaging hit piece.

reply

groby_b 6 hours ago [–]

Wait, did you just claim that the NYT is part of "the modern left"?

If so, that's the funniest thing I've read in the last few years. The NYT is the home of bothsidesism. It's certainly not "the modern left".

And as far as the NYT writing a hit piece to shut up a semi-popular blog, I'd suggest a quick reality check how much influence either has on public discourse. The idea the NYT would need to shut up SSC is just... pretty far out there.

reply

mlthoughts2018 6 hours ago [–]

If NYT has any angle to do a story on the blog, it’s very likely to be along the lines of “while this guy got some interesting things correct, look at these other horrible examples of sexism (eg consider actual data when forming opinions about gender pay gaps) and racism (eg consider actual data when forming opinions about racial motives in police violence).”

Your comment seems especially silly given that the NYT did, in fact, shut down this blog by threatening doxxing. So, by definition, the idea is not “far out there” or even remotely questionable.

reply

coffeemaniac 8 hours ago [–]

The modern left is constantly diving into the statistics of these topics, and if you think they're not it probably signals more that you're just not a part of that discussion. If you've let your conclusions be influenced by SSC and other reactionary blogs I'd urge you to check out some leftist spaces and ask around.

There's a lot of nuance, and more importantly, a lot of disagreement even in those spaces on these very issues.

reply

zozbot234 7 hours ago [–]

SSC is not a "reactionary blog" by any stretch of the imagination. The author is well known for their comprehensive debunking of politically reactionary views.

reply

HideousKojima 6 hours ago [–]

And the author is ethnically Jewish, atheist/agnostic, and polyamourous, so he definitely doesn't fit into the usual stereotypes of reactionaries if he is one

reply

coffeemaniac 5 hours ago [–]

I agree that he does not fit the common stereotypes of reactionaries. But that's really beside my point, I'm referring to his ideas and writing, not his ethnic or religious groups etc.

reply

▲ doubleunplussed 5 hours ago [–]

Don't forget asexual

reply

▲ doubleunplussed 3 hours ago [–]

Downvotes? This is not an insult. The guy is asexual.

reply

▲ randycupertino 1 hour ago [–]

I had to google as to how someone could be both asexual *and* polyamorous and turns out you can. til.

https://poly.land/2019/01/31/there-are-asexual-polyamorous-p...

reply

▲ mlthoughts2018 6 hours ago [–]

This is really not accurate. There are many topics where appealing to evidence or statistics is Not Allowed in leftist discourse. There are certain realities that are defined as not possible, politically, and permitted discourse flows from that.

The far right is even worse about this, appealing to braindead conspiracy theories, bald religion, fascism.

But the left is _really bad_ as well. Not “conspiracy theory gun nut” bad, but nowhere near “well balanced intellectual curiosity.”

reply

▲ gasull 1 hour ago [–]

Add https://theintercept.com to the list.

reply

▲ DaniloDias 12 hours ago [–]

“ We're better off with organizations who receive their money from donations. ”

We get value, in exchange for value.

reply

▲ radomysisky 4 hours ago [–]

NYT subscribers: to cancel your subscription online, change your address to California and a button will appear allowing you to cancel immediately. Unsubscribing won’t change much, as they can afford it. What will is freezing them out.

By RTing #ghostnyt you commit to not talking to NYT reporters or giving them quotes. Go direct if you have something to say.

https://twitter.com/hashtag/ghostnyt

reply

▲ lowdose 9 hours ago [–]

Taking in to account that NYT is quitting 3th party advertisement cold turkey [0], this would mean the NYT will publish anything that ensures the future existence of the NYT. Even if it means fluffing up an octogenarian with a visual deteriorating memory function against a thoroughbred Arabian horse in the race. Run Forrest, Run!

[0] https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.axios.com/new-york-times-ad...

reply

▲ mshron 12 hours ago [–]

I am genuinely baffled how Scott Alexander's post has turned into hundreds and hundreds of comments on cancel culture, as if it was anything near the #1 reason why he'd be in danger if his name was revealed.

Being famous is dangerous in every era, doubly so in an era where anybody unhinged basically has access to the same level of information you used to need a private investigator to get.

Tim Ferris said it well: "The point is this: you don’t need to do anything wrong to get death threats, rape threats, etc. You just need a big enough audience." [0]

The focus should be on the Times threatening to out him for no good reason, not his personal reasons for wanting to stay anonymous.

[0] https://tim.blog/2020/02/02/reasons-to-not-become-famous/

reply

▲ derefr 11 hours ago [–]

> I am genuinely baffled how Scott Alexander's post has turned into hundreds and hundreds of comments on cancel culture, as if it was anything near the #1 reason why he'd be in danger if his name was revealed.

People in comments sections (doesn’t matter which) don’t really “react to” or “engage with” the article very often. What they’re really doing is *being reminded by* the article of some thought that’s been affecting them in their own lives lately—which they then hold forth about. Sometimes the tangential thought can be *supported* by quoting the article (either literally, or in rebuttal); but this is still different from engaging with the article itself, per se.

For most people, the article is grist for the idea-mill of their own “blogging”, which they happen to do in the form of a comment. (Heck, that’s what I’m doing right now, to your comment!)

People who genuinely respond to a post as if they were in conversation with the original author are few and far between, and tend to put their responses on professional blogs rather than comments sections. (Which is funny, because "comments sections" are nominally *for* engaging with the post. We've all become very mixed up somehow.)

reply

▲ kerkeslager 3 hours ago [–]

This is pretty true on Hacker News. I engaged with the post as if I were in a conversation with the original author, not by posting here, but by sending an email to the original author.

I can't help but think that this effect isn't what I want from this community, however. I want reasoned discussion that helps me to see issues from various points of view, but instead I get a bunch of uninformed opinions from people who didn't even read the thing they're opining on.

reply

▲ kbenson 2 hours ago [–]

> I can't help but think that this effect isn't what I want from this community, however. I want reasoned discussion that helps me to see issues from various points of view, but instead I get a bunch of uninformed opinions from people who didn't even read the thing they're opining on.

Some of the absolute best discussions I've read and sometimes participated in on HN have been tangents or inconsequential to the article they were attached to. I would miss those types of discussion sorely if they were gone.

There are tools to help manage this though. You can collapse comment threads, and if you find a particular vein of discussion not really to your liking, I suggest doing that so you can focus on what you do enjoy (and others can do the same, even if the items they read and ignore are entirely different than yours).

Personally, since these comments aren't the comments of the article in question (usually. Sometimes they just refer you here!), I think of it less as comments to the author when posting here, and more like a discussion in a group examining that article. Sort of like a book group, where people splinter into subgroups to have discussions that interest them, and even those that failed to read the book might find a place to contribute.

reply

bachmeier 8 hours ago [–]

> People in comments sections (doesn’t matter which) don’t really “react to” or “engage with” the article very often. What they’re really doing is being reminded by the article of some thought that’s been affecting them in their own lives lately—which they then hold forth about.

Don't want to go off on a tangent, but HN trains its users to do that by posting one article after another that's behind a paywall. Of course there will be comments vaguely related to the article when you've created a culture of commenting without reading.

reply

TeMPOraL 7 hours ago [–]

I don't think that's it. HN trains its users for that by means of culture voting interesting things - because such tangential comments and resulting discussions are often much more interesting than the submitted article.

reply

sebastos 5 hours ago [–]

Well not for nothing, thanks for your comment - this is a really good insight!

reply

smsm42 7 hours ago [–]

Scott has been harassed by cancellers for years. It's a well-documented history, which was a serious issue for him and led to banning culture war topics in SSC-affiliated reddit section. There are still people and AFAIK organized communities on Reddit that target him. There were calls to his employers to get him fired and to friends to get them socially shunned.

Now imagine how much more of this one would get if their real name (and, by extension, address, employer, family, etc.) is published by NYT and easily accessible to anyone with rudimentary typing skills. Cancel culture is not the reason for NYT doxxing, but it makes the doxxing orders of magnitude more dangerous. And NYT must know that.

Yes, there are also random crazies. But I don't think I've read any storied about random crazies getting people fired from their jobs. I've read the last one about cancel culture doing that today. And have been reading them almost daily for a while.

> The focus should be on the Times threatening to out him for no good reason, not his personal reasons for wanting to stay anonymous.

It can be both.

reply

philwelch 3 hours ago [–]

> There are still people and AFAIK organized communities on Reddit that target him.

Though one of the more wholesome things I've seen is when I visited that subreddit you're referring to and the consensus seemed to be that doxxing Scott was not justified.

reply

DagAgren 6 hours ago [–]

[flagged]

zozbot234 6 hours ago [–]

It does not. Anything that's obviously politicized in a way that relates to the culture wars (including "Blue Tribe vs. Red Tribe" topics) is inappropriate outside CW-specific spaces. And obvious calls to harassment, violence, blatant bigotry etc. have always been off-limits altogether.

reply

DagAgren 6 hours ago [–]

But talk about how white people are superior was not off-limits, was it?

And the fact that he would clumsily ban everything political instead of specifically the nazi shit isn't exactly a great look, either.

reply

zozbot234 6 hours ago [–]

Political discussion relating to the culture wars was *not* banned, it was corraled in order to encourage *non*-culture-wars discussion. And by and large, nazi $#!+ and "white people are superior"-style bigotry *was* banned and got zero attention. (When people refer to racist views at SSC they don't mean that *literally* as a rule, they're just disparaging uncomfortable views about very well defined issues in social science and the like, that have zilch to do with superiority or supremacism of any sort, naziism etc. Shooting the messenger, basically.)

reply

DagAgren 6 hours ago [–]

> When people refer to racist views at SSC they don't mean that literally as a rule, they're just disparaging uncomfortable views about very well defined issues in social science and the like, that have zilch to do with superiority or supremacism of any sort, naziism etc. Shooting the messenger, basically.

Do please specify what those "uncomfortable views" actually are.

reply

zozbot234 5 hours ago [–]

The one that comes up the most, relating to 'race' specifically. is opposition to the claim that the comparatively low numbers of BIPOC minority folks in high-skill industries (such as 'tech') are indicative of a systemic racist bias *within* those industries. The broad consensus among SSC commenters is that this is a pipeline problem, and that concerns should thus be directed earlier in the pipeline. People do disagree, even vocally at times, about what the actual problem is and how to best address it.

Some observers *have* used this to argue that SSC commenters hold racist views towards BIPOC minorities. Obviously, this is not really the case.

There are other cases where prevailing narratives of systemic racism towards BIPOC folks were examined in careful and nuanced ways, generally with interesting, even compelling results. Unfortunately, some people don't like it when their simplistic views are challenged in such a way.

reply

▲ DagAgren 5 hours ago [–]

I'm getting the feeling you may not be presenting the discussion or the reactions to it entirely honestly here.

reply

▲ zozbot234 5 hours ago [–]

I sympathize. For whatever reason, many people take any sort of nuanced, academically-formal discussion about highly contentious topics involving politics, society, etc. as *prima facie* evidence of dishonesty. This peculiar sort of naïve anti-intellectualism is actually quite common across the culture-wars spectrum. I'm not saying that this is what you're doing here: I'm saying that this alone is reason to be highly skeptical wrt. the prevailing rumors within the 'left' about people on SSC being horribly bigoted, racist etc.

reply

▲ jahaja 4 hours ago [–]

I cannot stand the smug "we're objective academics that base our beliefs on nuanced logic and facts" of, to add insult to injury, self-declared "rationalists". That most are seemingly demographically and politically homogeneous are just the weirdest coincidence.

Dogwhistling doesn't stop being so just because you wrap it in an overly verbose academic sounding language. I think it's time for some introspection if this is all it takes for mainly young privileged [white] men to start considering race science and the likes as unfortunate but actually true. Exactly the same thing can be seen with figures like Jordan B Peterson.

reply

▲ zozbot234 4 hours ago [–]

Factual and useful observations don't stop being factual and useful just because some people might seek to exploit them as dogwhistling signals. If you've got a problem with malicious dogwhistling, deterring people from exploring these issues is exactly the *wrong* response. You want to do the opposite, so that honest, careful, nuanced inquiry drowns out any attempt at subverting the discussion.

(For instance, it was historically common to see expressions of concern about e.g. monopolistic industry and large business, damage to the environment, mass poverty etc. being used as dogwhistles obliquely referencing socialist views about the purported inherent evils of capitalism and the market economy, contrasted with bureaucratic central planning and control of the means of production. You don't see this to anything near the same extent nowadays, because most people who talk about these things *are* factually addressing the issues - often from a broad 'centrist/neoliberal' POV - not dogwhistling about unrelated stuff. So this can actually work.)

> That most are seemingly demographically and politically homogeneous are just the weirdest coincidence.

Demographically homogenous, yes this is a real issue that SSC folks are quite aware of. But it's also an issue about political discourse in general, not merely its awowedly-rationalist subset. Politically homogenous, not really. The whole reason debate was so vigorous within SSC was its *lack* of that kind of homogeneity.

reply

▲ jahaja 4 hours ago [–]

> You want to do the opposite, so that honest, careful, nuanced inquiry drowns out any attempt at subverting the discussion.

The problem with this crowd's writings is that they are overly verbose and unnecessary lengthy in some sort of war of attrition. And as the saying goes, it takes 10x more time to refute bullshit than to produce it.

> Politically homogenous, not really.

Just a quick very unscientific glance at twitter regarding this "attack" produces 10 right-wing types for every 1 centre-right, 0 remotely left. Even worse if we use the EU left-right spectrum. Being right or hard-right is not politically diverse even though this crowd seems to believe so.

reply

▲ free_rms 1 hour ago [–]

> And as the saying goes, it takes 10x more time to refute bullshit than to produce it.

Have you actually *read* anything from SSC?

His posts obviously had a *lot* of effort put into them. Reading them is much easier.

My recommendation: If you want to know how Scott Alexander thinks, read what Scott Alexander wrote, not what people on twitter wrote about him. Especially if they didn't read the piece either. Although I guess you'd have to use internet archive now.

Personally, I'm voting Green this fall and I love his writing.

reply

▲ zozbot234 4 hours ago [–]

> Just a quick very unscientific glance at twitter regarding this "attack" produces 10 right-wing types for every 1 centre-right

You're surprised that right-wing types have a beef with NYT? The "Fake News Media" NYT?

reply

▲ jahaja 3 hours ago [–]

Not really.

What surprises me however is this:

We have above mentioned demographics. We have controversial topics that seemingly panders to this particular demographic's confirmation bias. We have an academic pseudo-intellectual writing style that usually concludes in conservative or reactionary conclusions, much to this particular demographic's liking.

But however, this is all just a coincidence and simply based on unbiased facts.

reply

▲ zozbot234 3 hours ago [–]

> We have controversial topics that seemingly panders to this particular demographic's confirmation bias.

Race and gender are *minor* topics within SSC. You could say that the community has an undue emphasis on the culture wars, but it also has a unique way of addressing those debates which - to many participants - justifies that very emphasis. And if it's as uniformly right-wing ("conservative or reactionary") as you posit, it certainly goes to strenuous lengths to disguise this fact to the casual observer, specifically wrt. culture-wars discussion.

reply

▲ jahaja 41 minutes ago [–]

> Race and gender are minor topics within SSC.

Those topics may be minor, but also formative, especially given their impact.

▲ lliamander 8 hours ago [–]

The NYT has previously respected the anonymity of others, including an ISIS fighter[0]. That the NYT has a blanket policy about publishing real names is possible, but certainly suspicious.

> Tim Ferris said it well: "The point is this: you don’t need to do anything wrong to get death threats, rape threats, etc. You just need a big enough audience."

True, but a big part of why Scott has such a big audience is his willingness to write about the problems of cancel culture, and cancel culture would almost certainly come after him if he is doxxed.

[0]https://twitter.com/AlanMCole/status/1275446136375898114

reply

▲ panabee 5 hours ago [–]

one explanation: the policy exists and symbolizes the ideal for a news organization that prides itself on integrity and transparency. when this journalistic ideal conflicts with the practical concern of creating a story, the organization allows for discretion and trusts the writer to make an ethical decision.

in the ISIS case, the article likely doesn't happen without the fighter's cooperation, so the writer must defer to the subject or risk losing the story.

in the scott alexander case, the article can happen with or without subject cooperation, so the writer can afford to obey the stated policy and increase "transparency" on this story.

reply

▲ lliamander 5 hours ago [–]

> one explanation: the policy exists and symbolizes the ideal for a news organization that prides itself on integrity and transparency. when this journalistic ideal conflicts with the practical concern of creating a story, the organization allows for discretion and trusts the writer to make an ethical decision.

There's no indication that the cited policy allows for such discretion.

> in the scott alexander case, the article can happen with or without subject cooperation, so the writer can afford to obey the stated policy and increase "transparency" on this story.

Does that also apply to Virgil Texas of "Chapo Trap House"[1]?

It's clear that the NYT does not, in practice, have a blanket policy against pseudonyms. The writer's claims that it does are therefore at least somewhat BS. Violating the privacy of a practicing mental health professional who is obligated to hide his personal life from his patients is a pretty serious mistake. This could all be some sort of bureaucratic bungling, but as the saying goes: mistakes of this magnitude are rarely innocent.

[1] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/29/us/politics/bernie-sander...

EDIT: see this as well https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=23619347

More and more evidence against such a policy, and for the theory that this is a hit piece.

EDIT2: NYT protecting a therapist's identity in 2015 https://twitter.com/s8mb/status/1275436187713286144

reply

panabee 4 hours ago [–]

to clarify, the explanation isn't condoning the reporter's behavior. it is simply trying to explain the behavior without assuming malice.

it's obvious that doxxing scott alexander is not necessary for this article. in fact, it's actually quite dangerous given the history of threats.

reply

rndgermandude 1 hour ago [–]

It got malicious at the point where Scott ALexander pointed out the issues to the reporter and the reporter still refused to protect his identity.

reply

lliamander 4 hours ago [–]

> to clarify, the explanation isn't condoning the reporter's behavior. it is simply trying to explain the behavior without assuming malice.

Oh, I understand. And that would be my general default assumption as well. Scott also doesn't assume malice.

It's just that some form of the "malice" interpretation is looking increasingly likely.

reply

macspoofing 4 hours ago [–]

>I am genuinely baffled how Scott Alexander's post has turned into hundreds and hundreds of comments on cancel culture, as if it was anything near the #1 reason why he'd be in danger if his name was revealed.

Isn't it obvious that the upcoming NYT articles is going to be a hit piece with the goal of ruining his personal credibility and professional career.

I hope to be wrong, but somehow I don't think so.

>Being famous is dangerous in every era, doubly so in an era where anybody unhinged basically has access to the same level of information you used to need a private investigator to get.

Nobody would really care if it was just some twitter people bitching on twitter. The problem is that media, employers, sponsors, advertisers, etc. listen to them and act on what they think the mob wants.

And we are way past targeting famous people. The step-mother of the Atlanta cop who shot Brooks was fired for having the audacity of defending her step-son on social media. Imagine a world where you fault a mother for not disowning her son!! WaPo put together a 3000 word article attacking and naming a staffer for a Halloween costume she wore two years ago (with no ill intent!). She profusely apologized, but that doesn't matter - she was fired after being publicly humiliated by a noted paper of record who was also her employer. WaPo did that to their own employee!! How about that "Karen" (a modern day slur against women) in San Francisco who merely inquired, very very politely, if a gentleman who was writing out a BLM slogan on a property if he lived at that property .. she was dragged through the mud, forced into a public apology, which was not accepted (apologies are never accepted but instead are used as evidence of guilt) her small business was shut down (after the mob targeted her customers), and her husband was fired from his job.

This is all great stuff.

reply

vb6sp6 4 hours ago [–]

> Isn't it obvious that the upcoming NYT articles is going to be a hit piece with the goal of ruining his personal credibility and professional career.

I suppose if i had and axe to grind against NYT it might be "obvious". Even the blog author mentions it would be a "mostly positive piece". Where are you getting your information from?

reply

macspoofing 4 hours ago [–]

>I suppose if i had and axe to grind against NYT it might be "obvious".

Like I said, I hope to be wrong, but I am cynical about the motives of NYT, especially given this quote from the blog post: "He told me it would be a ___mostly___ positive piece about how we were an interesting gathering place for people in tech, and how we were ahead of the curve on some aspects of the coronavirus situation." (emphasis mine) - that's a reporter buttering up Scott Alexander to get a quote and compliance until the hit piece drops.

When that article drops, we'll see. If it is balanced and fair I will own up to being wrong. Gladly. I just don't thinks so.

reply

darawk 6 hours ago [–]

Ya. And even if he was writing on totally un-emotional topics, like a food blog or something, his job is such that patients being able to discover these aspects of his personal life would be likely to pollute his doctor-patient relationship with them. Psychiatrists understandably want to limit what their patients know about them, to keep the focus on *the patient* and their needs, rather than the personality of their psychiatrist.

I think this is what Scott's more concerned about than anything. I'm sure he worries about canceling and stuff too, but this is really out of concern for his ability to treat patients effectively at his day job.

reply

kerkeslager 4 hours ago [–]

I agree with you that we should focus on the doxxing, not his reasons for staying anonymous. As far as I'm concerned, people don't need a reason to want to be anonymous.

But I think cancel culture is still relevant because it very well may be why the NYT was threatening to dox him.

reply

phkahler 6 hours ago [–]

>> Tim Ferris said it well: "The point is this: you don’t need to do anything wrong to get death threats, rape threats, etc. You just need a big enough audience."

And that is why we need to abolish anonymity on the internet and ensure traceability. If people can trace threats and harassment, it either won't happen or can be reported.

reply

dumbfoundded 6 hours ago [–]

That's a lot of trust in the government. It's also the exact opposite of what the whole blog post is about, preserving anonymity.

reply

thinkingemote 19 hours ago [–]

It doesn't take too much imagination to see how easy it would be to write a hit piece.

Scott writes eloquently and in depth, but the news is not about either of those things. Scott has written a few times about problematic issues which have surfaced in recent months and it would be very easy to write "some people say that Scott is ${label}" with just a bit of superficial quotes. Today's climate of online mob justice in partnership with click bait news would not go well for Scott at all.

reply

jychang 17 hours ago [–]

Scott is the type of individual where literally any side of a political debate can write a hit piece with some quotes, because he considers ALL the sides of a debate. Unfortunately, that's a rare trait these days.

reply

lliamander 5 hours ago [–]

I don't think I've seen anyone right-of-center have anything really bad to say about Scott. I doubt any of those outlets (Breitbart, etc.) would want to do that to him.

This may itself be reason for some people to distrust Scott, except that he's probably done more to bring people to a moderate or left-of-center position on some topics than all the people shouting "racist!" combined.

reply

donohoe 14 hours ago [–]

Sure, but thats not the issue here. It is about naming sources.

reply

rabidrat 2 hours ago [–]

The article is *about* Scott, as a person who runs a popular blog. The source is named "Scott Alexander". There is no need to publish his personal information. If the NYT wants to verify that he is actually a practicing psychiatrist etc, then they can gather that information, do the legwork, publish the information ("NYT can confirm that SA is who he says he is"), without jeopardizing that practice.

reply

luckylion 16 hours ago [–]

The anti-out-of-context-quote-hit-piece-insurance that Sam Harris went to in his recent podcast on police violence etc was insane. I fully understand why, he's been burned by the Twitter mob before, but it's eye-opening to the media-induced reasonable paranoia some "public" people will go through when there's basically three paragraphs of "I'm not saying this is the one and only truth, I believe in equality, justice..." for every one paragraph of stats or opinion they post.

It has a very religious witch hunt feel where you constantly need to assure everybody that you are totally not a member of the out-group and you believe in the same things they do and you really are not possessed by the devil and they really shouldn't burn you, but they may have gotten something a *tiny* bit wrong in their, of course totally justified, blind rage.

reply

dundarious 10 hours ago [–]

Slate Star Codex says they were expecting a relatively nice article, not a hit piece.

Are you referring to Episode 207? https://overcast.fm/+KhqFMR3J4

I think Sam did a very poor job in that episode -- he was preaching exclusively to the choir. He spends the start of the podcast explaining the important distinction between justified and unjustified police involved killings. This is a very important distinction, and I would love to see data about the racial breakdown of unjustified killings, relative to a racial breakdown of police interactions.

But, Sam then completely abandons this distinction. He discusses "An Empirical Analysis of Racial Differences in Police Use of Force", Roland G. Fryer, Jr. July 2007, a NYC-only study that does not measure unjustified killings.

Then, as usual, he spends an awful lot of time spouting his usual rhetoric of truth, epistemology, science, data, facts, and knowledge. This is merely rhetoric because his reference to that study is clearly meant to be evidence that we have the truth -- that police brutality is the issue, and unjustified killings do not disproportionately affect black Americans. He even discusses the Fryer study and moments later is confidently stating "race isn't the relevant variable". This is a grand claim that can't possibly be justified based on the Fryer study.

All interspersed with more rhetoric such as:

- "expiation of sins" for you Botox as if you're "woke as AOC"

- "ecstasy of ideological conformity"

- "woke analysis" is where "democratic politics goes to die" (probably means Democratic Party politics)

- "social activists playing chicken with the forces of chaos"

- "form of political pornography"

- "unable to speak or even think about facts"

Sam's usual parade of platitudes about epistemology are best understood by another quotation from this episode: "the difference between the branding of a movement and its actual aims, that's why propaganda works".

reply

luckylion 10 hours ago [–]

> Slate Star Codex says they were expecting a relatively nice article, not a hit piece.

Yeah, I wasn't referencing the article specifically, but the general state. What Sam Harris said at the beginning of that episode (I was talking about the one you linked, but I only read the transcript, I don't have the attention span for podcasts) rang true for me: opening your mouth is risky for normal people, but it's extra risky if you're a publicist/commentator/celebrity and that has an extreme chilling effect.

I don't want to debate his opinions, I don't regularly listen to Harris, but the fact that he felt it's necessary to add so much "please don't take this out of context" left me impressed, and I haven't marked Harris down as somebody who'd do that for effect, to claim victimhood etc. I also don't believe that he does so for his usual audience, because they most likely know his general positions, know that he's not alt-right or a white supremacist and that he may say something that doesn't intuitively sound "okay" but usually has at least some reason for it. On the contrary, I think he does it purely for the Twitter mob who is sure to look for material in whatever he says. And that's really just a sad state of affairs, when any public utterance is basically "my lawyer has advised me not to answer that question" because whatever you say can and will be used against you in the court of public opinion, will be taken out of context and will be enhanced with rumors and lies.

That's not specific to Sam Harris, of course, and the tactic isn't specific to whatever you want to label the people who hate him. It's pretty universal in both the targets and those that target them.

reply

syshum 15 hours ago [–]

it has the feel of the religious witch hunt because that is exactly what is has become. Many of these groups no longer look at data or science or any empirical evidence for the basis of their positions or policy, it is pure emotional dogma at this point. They are non-theistic religions

reply

totalperspectiv 15 hours ago [–]

Political groups have replaced religious groups as providing a sense of meaning and purpose in modern times.

Politics is the new religion. Combine that with destabilizing effects of instant communication and social media and you get what we have now. Essentially divergent realities created by our narrow casted views (news feeds) that create a modern day tower of Babel moment where we literally can't understand each other.

reply

projektfu 15 hours ago [–]

Scott’s “Meditations on Moloch” is a good summary of the underlying issue. It’s too bad I can’t provide a link.

reply

woofcat 14 hours ago [–]

http://archive.is/FY1BJ

reply

dmurdoch 15 hours ago [–]

John McWhorter makes this exact claim in his debate on the damage of racism and anti-racism. Its an interesting full debate but here is just his opening remarks.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT2rlJe9cuU

reply

luckylion 13 hours ago [–]

And they heavily share the proselytizing aspect of many religions as well.

I generally doubt that the striking down of religion was a force for good. When we've kept the "group identity generation" only partially in this world and a lot in the next, you can feel all high and mighty knowing that you will go to paradise while the wrong-believers will go to hell, and God will judge everybody.

Now, there's no more God to judge, there's no more "in the afterlife", there's only here and now, and everything becomes an integral part of your identity, from your programming language to your favored comic universe, and it all feels much fiercer. Maybe it's the lack of the after-life where they can be punished, so you need to see them punished in this life.

reply

gringoDan 15 hours ago [–]

Reading this made me think of two essays I've recently revisited.

1. The Sound of Silence, by Jessica Livingston

Three years ago she argued that the smartest people are silencing themselves because the downside risk of being attacked for (misinterpretations of) their opinions are too high. People are wary of sharing useful information outside of trusted circles, which serves to consolidate power with insiders – those who are already powerful.

2. What You Can't Say, by Paul Graham

Reflection on how to separate truths that will endure from "moral fashions" particular to a time and place in history. Written over 15 years ago and more relevant today.

> What scares me is that there are moral fashions too. They're just as arbitrary, and just as invisible to most people. But they're much more dangerous. Fashion is mistaken for good design; moral fashion is mistaken for good. Dressing oddly gets you laughed at. Violating moral fashions can get you fired, ostracized, imprisoned, or even killed.

[1] https://foundersatwork.posthaven.com/the-sound-of-silence [2] http://paulgraham.com/say.html

reply

tinyhouse 13 hours ago [–]

I was just thinking about this now after reading attacks on Yann Lecun on twitter. He's a prominent AI figure (head of facebook research and turing award recipient). My interpretation - he was saying that bias in AI is mostly a problem of data. He didn't say there's no bias or that you can't solve bias with modeling. Just that the model itself isn't what causing the bias. One woman researcher started attacking him and everyone is backing her up... even calling him a racist. I guess a lot of people who work on fairness in AI got offended because they feel he calls their research BS. (which I don't think is what he meant)

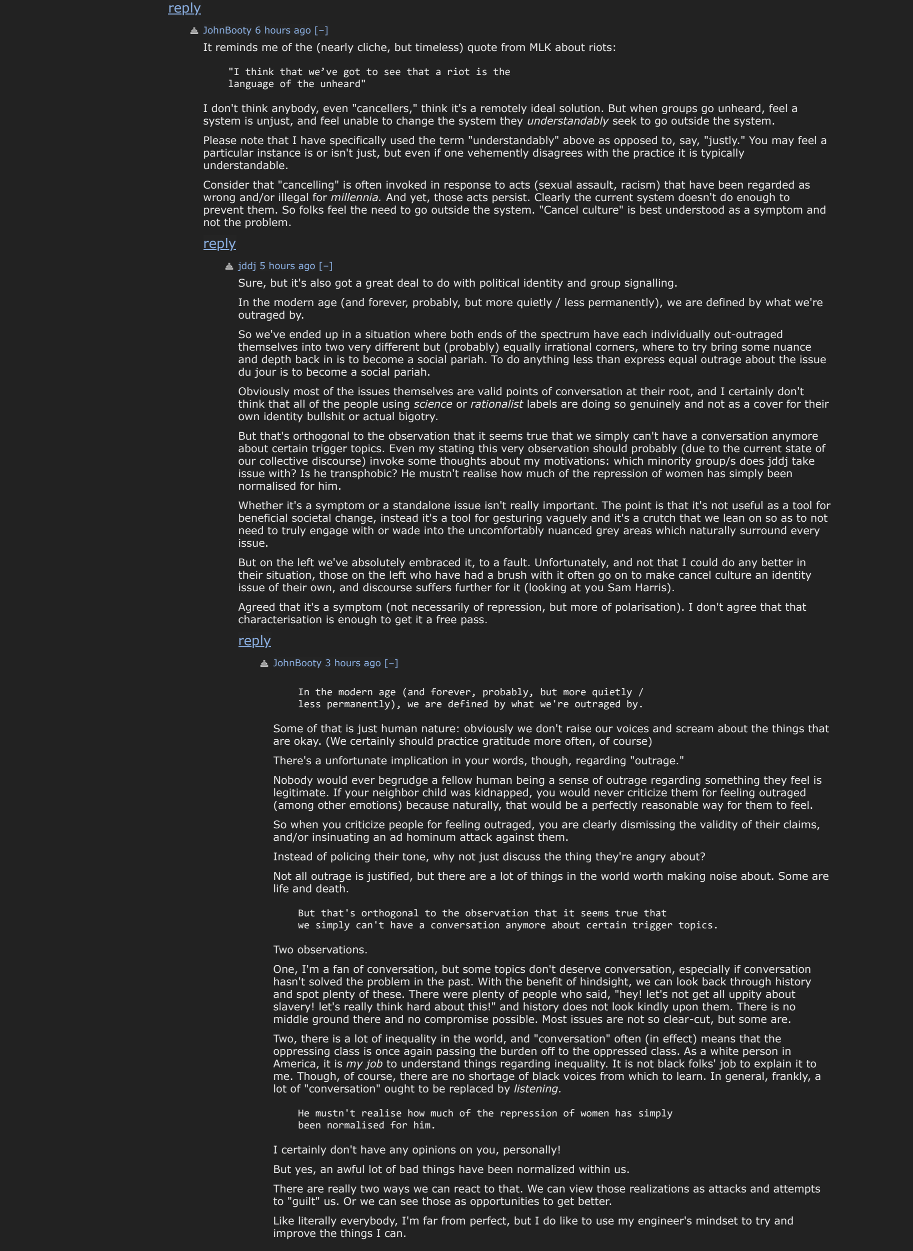
I think his points are informative but instead of creating a useful discussion and debate, people focus on attacking him. I wouldn't be surprised if some people will request FB to fire him... (which thankfully won't happen) It's likely next time he will think twice before saying his opinion on social media. That's how toxic social media has become.

Update: Great to see this got so many upvotes so quickly. Just shows how biased (no pun intended) social media like Twitter is, and how concerned people are to say their opinion publicly these days.

reply

holtalanm 13 hours ago [–]

It has been this way for a while. Outrage/cancel culture is an absolute pox upon our population that really needs to stop.



reply

▲ JohnBooty 6 hours ago [–]

It reminds me of the (nearly cliche, but timeless) quote from MLK about riots:

```
"I think that we've got to see that a riot is the
language of the unheard"
```

I don't think anybody, even "cancellers," think it's a remotely ideal solution. But when groups go unheard, feel a system is unjust, and feel unable to change the system they *understandably* seek to go outside the system.

Please note that I have specifically used the term "understandably" above as opposed to, say, "justly." You may feel a particular instance is or isn't just, but even if one vehemently disagrees with the practice it is typically understandable.

Consider that "cancelling" is often invoked in response to acts (sexual assault, racism) that have been regarded as wrong and/or illegal for *millennia.* And yet, those acts persist. Clearly the current system doesn't do enough to prevent them. So folks feel the need to go outside the system. "Cancel culture" is best understood as a symptom and not the problem.

reply

▲ jddj 5 hours ago [–]

Sure, but it's also got a great deal to do with political identity and group signalling.

In the modern age (and forever, probably, but more quietly / less permanently), we are defined by what we're outraged by.

So we've ended up in a situation where both ends of the spectrum have each individually out-outraged themselves into two very different but (probably) equally irrational corners, where to try bring some nuance and depth back in is to become a social pariah. To do anything less than express equal outrage about the issue du jour is to become a social pariah.

Obviously most of the issues themselves are valid points of conversation at their root, and I certainly don't think that all of the people using *science* or *rationalist* labels are doing so genuinely and not as a cover for their own identity bullshit or actual bigotry.

But that's orthogonal to the observation that it seems true that we simply can't have a conversation anymore about certain trigger topics. Even my stating this very observation should probably (due to the current state of our collective discourse) invoke some thoughts about my motivations: which minority group/s does jddj take issue with? Is he transphobic? He mustn't realise how much of the repression of women has simply been normalised for him.

Whether it's a symptom or a standalone issue isn't really important. The point is that it's not useful as a tool for beneficial societal change, instead it's a tool for gesturing vaguely and it's a crutch that we lean on so as to not need to truly engage with or wade into the uncomfortably nuanced grey areas which naturally surround every issue.

But on the left we've absolutely embraced it, to a fault. Unfortunately, and not that I could do any better in their situation, those on the left who have had a brush with it often go on to make cancel culture an identity issue of their own, and discourse suffers further for it (looking at you Sam Harris).

Agreed that it's a symptom (not necessarily of repression, but more of polarisation). I don't agree that that characterisation is enough to get it a free pass.

reply

▲ JohnBooty 3 hours ago [–]

```
In the modern age (and forever, probably, but more quietly /
less permanently), we are defined by what we're outraged by.
```

Some of that is just human nature: obviously we don't raise our voices and scream about the things that are okay. (We certainly should practice gratitude more often, of course)

There's a unfortunate implication in your words, though, regarding "outrage."

Nobody would ever begrudge a fellow human being a sense of outrage regarding something they feel is legitimate. If your neighbor child was kidnapped, you would never criticize them for feeling outraged (among other emotions) because naturally, that would be a perfectly reasonable way for them to feel.

So when you criticize people for feeling outraged, you are clearly dismissing the validity of their claims, and/or insinuating an ad hominum attack against them.

Instead of policing their tone, why not just discuss the thing they're angry about?

Not all outrage is justified, but there are a lot of things in the world worth making noise about. Some are life and death.

```
But that's orthogonal to the observation that it seems true that
we simply can't have a conversation anymore about certain trigger topics.
```

Two observations.

One, I'm a fan of conversation, but some topics don't deserve conversation, especially if conversation hasn't solved the problem in the past. With the benefit of hindsight, we can look back through history and spot plenty of these. There were plenty of people who said, "hey! let's not get all uppity about slavery! let's really think hard about this!" and history does not look kindly upon them. There is no middle ground there and no compromise possible. Most issues are not so clear-cut, but some are.

Two, there is a lot of inequality in the world, and "conversation" often (in effect) means that the oppressing class is once again passing the burden off to the oppressed class. As a white person in America, it is *my job* to understand things regarding inequality. It is not black folks' job to explain it to me. Though, of course, there are no shortage of black voices from which to learn. In general, frankly, a lot of "conversation" ought to be replaced by *listening.*

```
He mustn't realise how much of the repression of women has simply
been normalised for him.
```

I certainly don't have any opinions on you, personally!

But yes, an awful lot of bad things have been normalized within us.

There are really two ways we can react to that. We can view those realizations as attacks and attempts to "guilt" us. Or we can see those as opportunities to get better.

Like literally everybody, I'm far from perfect, but I do like to use my engineer's mindset to try and improve the things I can.

```
Whether it's a symptom or a standalone issue isn't really important.
The point is that it's not useful as a tool for beneficial societal change,
instead it's a tool for gesturing vaguely and it's a crutch that we lean on
so as to not need to truly engage with or wade into the uncomfortably
nuanced grey areas which naturally surround every issue.
```

Ah, the ol' "bumper sticker activist" criticism.

Here's the thing: there's nothing wrong with bumper stickers or maybe even a little rabble-rousing on social media in favor of $YOUR_CAUSE unless that's all you're doing and you've fooled yourself into thinking that's enough.

Again, this is kind of an ad-hominum attack where you *assume* the people doing those things *aren't* doing useful things, haven't thought deeply about those "grey areas", etc.

reply

▲ trinityd 5 hours ago [–]

Is this not victim blaming? If you attempt to ruin someone's life because they said "guacamole nigga penis" I don't think you can use "we live in a society" as justification. Seems like a flimsy excuse. Literal KKK members feel like they need to "go outside the system" to harm black people, does that make lynching okay?

Beyond that, characterizing cancel culture as "going outside the system" is silly. It's literally tattling, how much more sucking up to the system could one be? If "the system" (aka the overall collection of people in positions of power) was a-okay with sexual assault and racism cancel culture wouldn't exist because you wouldn't be able to complain to bosses, schools, etc. about people raping or being racist.

reply

▲ JohnBooty 4 hours ago [–]

```
Literal KKK members feel like they need to "go
outside the system" to harm black people, does
that make lynching okay?
```

Absolutely not, of course.

My initial post said nothing to indicate that cancel culture was a good thing, or that it always represented a just cause.

Nor did it say that "going outside the system" always represented a just cause, etc.

reply

▲ sololipsist 4 hours ago [–]

lol. The idea that people in cancel culture aren't *literally the institution* right now.

This is the hilarious thing about this worldview. As you people gain more and more power you have to keep positioning yourself as the underdog.

You're not the first ideology to do this, and you won't be the last. EVERYBODY sees right through this even though you all pretend not to... but most importantly the kids see right through it. This is why Gen Z hates millennials so much.

reply

▲ factsaresacred 5 hours ago [–]

> But when groups go unheard, feel a system is unjust, and feel unable to change the system they understandably seek to go outside the system.

They're being heard loud and clear. That's the problem. Their incessant whining and searching for the "problematic" behind every issue is crowding out reasonable discourse and discussion.

It's a form of mob rule and it's progressing from tiresome to downright hideous as more and more careers are destroyed by its vindictiveness.

> "cancelling" is often invoked in response to acts (sexual assault, racism) that have been regarded as wrong and/or illegal for millennia

You have it upside down. Cancelling is often the result of applying today's morals on yesterday's actions. People/books/movies/statues weren't "cancelled" before because nobody had a problem before. But now everything's retrospectively a target of the new moral crusaders.

reply

▲ JohnBooty 4 hours ago [–]

```
People/books/movies/statues weren't "cancelled" before
because nobody had a problem before.
```

No, you didn't *hear* the problems before.

Plenty of people found these things lousy for decades, and in some cases centuries.

But not enough listened. So the voices became louder, and more unruly.

It's like when you try to tell your neighbor *nicely* that his dog's been pooping on your yard. And he does nothing about it for years. Then one day he wonders why you've left an enormous pile of dog poop on his doorstep.

Gross? Rude? Highly non-ideal? Sure. But he didn't listen to reasonable discourse.

reply

▲ nogabebop23 13 hours ago [–]

Isn't a large part of this down to the forum of communication vs. the level of discourse? I mean, if you want to have a nuanced, balanced discussion about a potentially sensitive topic you just can't do that on twtter, SMS, message board, etc.

Even on HN you see issues and that's will pretty tight tribal norms, moderation and topics where commenters aren't usually deeply or emotionally involved.

I agree with your overall opinion, but i think that change actually starts with people reflecting on the impact of the chosen medium on their message. Not self-censorship but "positioning"

reply

▲ throwaway894345 12 hours ago [–]

> I mean, if you want to have a nuanced, balanced discussion about a potentially sensitive topic you just can't do that on twtter, SMS, message board, etc.

Lots of people are canceled because they said or did something in the real world that was dragged onto Twitter, the New York Times, Reddit, or some other cesspool. It's not as easy as "don't expect substantial debate from toxic platforms".

Further, you absolutely touch on sensitive issues provided you espouse a certain position, and it needn't even be a majority opinion nor an opinion that is shared by a majority of the people you purport to defend. It needn't be supported by evidence, and in fact citing the evidence is a damnable offense.

Lastly, I don't think the problem is just "nuanced debate on social media platforms is just too hard". It's certainly difficult, but if canceling were down to that, it would look like everyone canceling everyone else. Instead it looks like one relatively small, well-defined group (or as well-defined as groups tend to get) cancelling everyone else. Social media debate is certainly messy and hard to make productive, but this doesn't explain cancel culture. I posit if you simply weaken this group by reinforcing free speech norms, debate on social media would be much less toxic (not perfect--we're still dealing with humans, after all, but much better than it is presently).

reply

▲ holtalanm 13 hours ago [–]

that is a fair statement. I don't think you're wrong about it, by any means. I do think that we can't lay the entire blame on the medium of communication, though, either. People really need to take a step back when they find themselves falling into this mindset and reset. Part of the issue, I believe, is a genuine lack of critical thinking and compassion on most online platforms that spills over into everyday communication. Instead of getting angry about what you may think someone is trying to say, maybe make sure they said what you think they said before being outraged about it. Also, this whole 'staying silent is the same as being against us' notion is toxic as hell. I've seen many who have a decent platform on twitter or youtube get attacked for simply remaining quiet about some of the more visible topics lately.

reply

▲ smsm42 7 hours ago [–]

I think if by some divine miracle Twitter disappeared and some mysterious supernatural force prevented re-creating it by any means - our culture probably would be much better off. There are some excellent people on Twitter but by now they're just giving legitimacy to the cesspool. Twitter adds nothing to them and they'd be as well - probably much better - on a different platform.

reply

▲ cuspycode 7 hours ago [–]

I am very likely naive in these circumstances, but I honestly don't understand how cancel culture can work at all. So there are some voices on twitter who loudly express their immature mob mentality. Why don't all the sane people just block them and ignore them, and then go on with their lives as if nothing happened?

reply

▲ Veen 7 hours ago [–]

If it was just a few voices on Twitter, it would be less of a problem. But it's also journalists, academics, grievance entrepreneurs of various stripes — all of whom exert an influence on the general public. It's businesses that don't want to get on the wrong side of those people. And it's employees of those businesses who don't want to get fired.

"Cancel culture" is just a new spin on scapegoating, behavioral contagion, and public shaming, all of which have a very long history.

reply

▲ zozbot234 7 hours ago [–]

> Why don't all the sane people just block them and ignore them, and then go on with their lives as if nothing happened?

They can't afford to do that, because this "mob" is actively dangerous. They will slander their enemies with all sorts of baseless accusations, call their workplaces to try and get them fired, manufacture false flag harrassment/cyberbulling and try to attribute it to them, etc. It's no different from the 8chan trolls - in fact they come from adjacent Internet subcultures, quite literally.

reply

▲ redisman 4 hours ago [–]

I don't see why would you not include the 8channers who do the exact same thing to prominent women in games or anti-vaxxers trying to destroy the lives of doctors/researchers. There's no difference in tactics or goals.

reply

▲ kps 6 hours ago [–]

> Why don't all the sane people just block them and ignore them, and then go on with their lives

Because ‘sane people’ does not include your employer, who will throw you to the mob to appease them. In the US that also means losing your health insurance, so it can be a death sentence for you or your loved ones.

(I'll regret posting this when I'm starving in a gutter.)

reply

▲ redisman 5 hours ago [–]

Because it gets very scary once the handful of truly unhinged people start doxxing and posting graphic and detailed threats and showing up at your house.

Just look at the death threats someone like Fauci is getting for doing his job and informing the public. Not that many people want to deal with being a public target to the worst actors in society.

reply

▲ groby_b 6 hours ago [–]

Yes.

However, it *cannot* stop as long as a large segment of the people in power do with abandon whatever they feel like, without any repercussion.

This is the only way it is possible for many people to get anything remotely resembling justice (although often it's revenge). As long as we don't fundamentally address inequality and deeply unjust systems, I don't think it will stop.

reply

▲ ISL 13 hours ago [–]

Is that request not a call to cancel cancel-culture?

reply

vorpalhex 12 hours ago [–]

No, that would be if we called cancel-culture racist and anyone who perpetuated it a white supremacist.

By assigning moral outrage to one side of the debate, we remove the pretense of a debate. It's no longer about evidence and facts but vilifying one side. It's ad hominem 2.0 if you will, and it works because we as a society have a visceral negative reaction to some labels.

The problem is that pavlovian-esque training can be untrained. If you call everyone who does something you don't like a nazi, then pretty soon it doesn't seem like being a nazi is all that big of a deal. That in itself is bad because by abusing the term you buy cover for actual, literal nazis. The same issue applies when you label everything racist or sexist or otherwise.

Words have power, but that power can fade if misused.

reply

hsod 10 hours ago [–]

Calling them dangerous and a pox on society seems in the same ballpark of moral outrage as calling someone racist.

reply

Nasrudith 6 hours ago [–]

More the pox on society than dangerous per se. Dangerous is a big category with nuance while always advising caution. A car which works perfectly can be dangerous but a car which randomly catches on fire without warning is also dangerous.

That nuance allows for far more room for debate.

reply

DagAgren 6 hours ago [–]

> it works because we as a society have a visceral negative reaction to some labels.

Do you know why we have that reaction? Because of millions upon millions of dead, innocent humans. That is what those ideologies lead to. We learned this lesson once, and we learned it very well. We don't want that to happen again. We don't want to let those ideas spread again. We don't want to see the mass graves again they lead to again. We learned that.

Some people have forgotten, though.

reply

monoideism 5 hours ago [–]

Some people remember the horror of Nazi Germany as well as the horror of the Red Terror, Stalinist Russia, and the Cultural Revolution.

reply

MFLoon 6 hours ago [–]

Apologies for the somewhat pedantic aside, but I want to point out: "literal Nazi" is a borderline oxymoron. There is no Nazi party, nor is Nazism a coherent political ideology to which one can seriously ascribe. I suppose people who were active members when it still existed can still be considered "literal Nazis", in which case there's probably less than 50 left on earth. But saying that anyone else who claims adherence to Nazism or allegiance to the (completely defunct) Nazi party makes them a literal Nazi actually elevates their status from what it is, which is just a pathetic racist cosplayer.

reply

traverseda 11 hours ago [–]

Tolerant of everything except intolerance et-all.

reply

holtalanm 12 hours ago [–]

i see we are in a conundrum.

reply

ISL 12 hours ago [–]

Understanding apparent paradoxes seems like an important place to start.

The best history/government teacher I had in school had a recurring throughline for our classes. Paraphrasing: "It is better, in the long run, to be for something than against something."

To be against something is to highlight a problem. To be for something is to offer a possible direction for the future.

reply

holtalanm 12 hours ago [–]

o.0 I like that a lot.

reply

Der_Einzige 7 hours ago [–]

That belief is directly hostile to critical thinking.

Critical thinking is the ability to critique - specifically, to explain what is wrong or bad about a particular system.

reply

Nasrudith 6 hours ago [–]

I see it more as acknowledging limitations. Critical thinking is a filter as opposed to a source.

Besides because something isn't as good as another doesn't make something bad. A good new idea or appeoach and critical thinking is better than just a good new idea and can guide the approach. They aren't mutually exclusive.

reply

mooseburger 6 hours ago [–]

Critical thinking is supposed to be just one tool, everyone should have more than that in their mental toolbox. It's useless on its own, we need the capacity to build systems more than we need the ability to tear them down. It's also even harmful when only applied selectively (e.g. never to one's own, or to popular, positions(s)).

reply

▲ nlpprof 13 hours ago [–]

I'm in the field - though not as prominent as Yann (who has been very nice and helpful in my few interactions with him) - and your interpretation is off. People are disagreeing with his stance that researchers should not bother exploring bias implications of their research. (He says this is because bias is a problem of data - and therefore we should focus on building cool models and let production engineers worry about training production models on unbiased data.)

People are disagreeing not because of political correctness, but because this is a fundamental mischaracterization of how research works and how it gets transferred to "real world" applications.

(1) Data fuels modern machine learning. It shapes research directions in a really fundamental way. People decide what to work on based on what huge amounts of data they can get their hands on. Saying "engineers should be the ones to worry about bias because it's a data problem" is like saying "I'm a physicist, here's a cool model, I'll let the engineers worry about whether it works on any known particle in any known world."

(2) Most machine learning research is empirical (though not all). It's very rare to see a paper (if not impossible nowadays, since large deep neural networks are so massive and opaque) that works purely off math without showing that its conclusions improve some task on some dataset. No one is doing research without data, and saying "my method is good because it works on this data" means you are making choices and statements about what it means to "work" - which, as we've seen, involves quite a lot of bias.

(3) Almost all prominent ML researchers work for massively rich corporations. He and his colleagues don't work in ivory towers where they develop pure algorithms which are then released over the ivy walls into the wild, to be contaminated by filthy reality. He works for Facebook. He's paid with Facebook money. So why draw this imaginary line between research and production? He is paid to do research that will go into production.

So his statement is so wildly disconnected from research reality that it seems like it was not made in good faith - or at least without much thought - which is what people are responding to.

Also, language tip - a "woman researcher" is a "researcher".

reply

▲ dcolkitt 12 hours ago [–]

> He works for Facebook. He's paid with Facebook money. So why draw this imaginary line between research and production? He is paid to do research that will go into production.

This is a silly standard to uphold. The sizable bulk of American academic researchers are at least partially funded by grants made from the US federal budget.

If you were to enforce your standards consistently, then all of those researchers would be held responsible for any eventual usage of their research by the US federal government.

I really doubt you apply the same standard. So, the criticism mostly seems to be an isolated demand for rigor. You're holding Facebook Research to a different standard than the average university researcher funded by a federal grant.

reply

▲ ncallaway 11 hours ago [–]

This seems almost purposefully disingenuous to me.

Yann LeCun isn't receiving a partial research grant from Facebook. He's literally an employee of Facebook. His job title is "VP & Chief AI Scientist" (at least according to LinkedIn).

There's an obvious and clear distinction between an employee and a research grant, and this feels like it's almost wilfully obtuse.

reply

▲ nlpprof 11 hours ago [–]

Did you read what I wrote?

I don't think his argument is true. (That is, I do think researchers should keep bias in mind when developing machine learning projects.) (Regardless of their funding sources.)

Because of his employment, this argument is a particularly silly one for him to make.

reply

▲ tinyhouse 12 hours ago [–]

Don't have a lot of time to respond now, but will try to do it later. Just a quick note. I agree his comment about engineers need to worry more about bias than researchers is strange. But in my opinion it wasn't the focus of what he was tying to say.

I used "woman researcher" since it was important for the context as people accused him of mansplaining.

reply

▲ vlthr 10 hours ago [–]

I agree with all of your points about the diffusion of responsibility that is common in ML, though I think you may not be sensitive enough to the harmful framing being created by the "anti-bias" side.

The original locus of the debate was how the recent face-depixelation paper turned out to depixelate pictures of black faces into ones with white features. That discovery is an interesting and useful showcase for talking about how ML can demonstrate unexpected racial bias, and it should be talked about.

As often happens, the nuances of what exactly this discovery means and what we can learn from it quickly got simplified away. Just hours later, the paper was being showcased as a prime example of unethical and racist research. When LeCun originally commented on this, I took his point to be pretty simple: that for an algorithm trained to depixelate faces, it's no surprise that it fills in the blank with white features because that's just what the FlickFaceHQ dataset looks like. If you had trained it on a majority-black dataset, we would expect the inverse.

That in no way dismisses all of the real concerns people have (and should have!) about bias in ML. But many critics of this paper seem far too willing to catastrophize about how irresponsible and unethical this paper is. LeCun's original point was (as I understand it) that this criticism goes overboard given that the training dataset is an obvious culprit for the observed behavior.

Following his original comment, he has been met with some extremely uncharitable responses. The most circulated example is this tweet (https://twitter.com/timnitGebru/status/1274809417653866496?s...) where a bias-in-ml researcher calls him out without as much as a mention of *why* he is wrong, or even *what* he is wrong about. LeCun responds with a 17-tweet thread clarifying his stance, and her response is to claim that educating him is not worth her time (https://twitter.com/timnitGebru/status/1275191341455048704?s...).

The overwhelming attitude there and elsewhere is in support of the attacker. Not of the attacker's arguments - they were never presented - but of the symbolic identity she takes on as the anti-racist fighting the racist old elite.

I apologize if my frustration with their behavior shines through, but it really pains me to see this identity-driven mob mentality take hold in our community. Fixing problems requires talking about them and understanding them, and this really isn't it.

reply

smsm42 7 hours ago [–]

So, your argument is that you disagree with data being the root of the problem by arguing that data "shapes research directions in a really fundamental way", research is "empirical" (i.e. based on data) and his research can't be isolated from data it'd be used on in production?

Looks to me that you're argumentatively agreeing with Yann.

reply

joshuamorton 5 hours ago [–]

Not really, Yann's original claim (which he sort of kind of partially walked back) was that data is the only source of bias [0][1]. He walked that back somewhat to claim that he was being very particular in this case[2], which is perhaps true, but still harmful. The right thing to do when you make a mistake is apologize. Not double down and badly re-explain what other experts have been telling you back at them.

So then Yann notes that generic models don't have bias[3]. This is, probably, true. I'd be surprised if on the whole, "CNNs" encoded racial bias. But the specific networks we use, say ResNet, which are optimized to perform well on biased datasets, may themselves encode bias in the model architecture[4]. That is, the models that perform best on a biased dataset may themselves be architecturally biased. In fact, we'd sort of expect it.

And that all ignores one of the major issues which Yann entirely skips, but which Timnit covers in some of her work: training on data, even "representative data" encodes the biases that are present in the world today.

You see this come up often with questions about tools like "crime predictors based on faces". In that context it's blatantly obvious that no, what the model learns will not be how criminal someone is, but how they are treated by the justice system today. Those two things *might* be somewhat correlated, but they're not causally related, and so trying to predict one from the other is a fool's errand and a dangerous fool's errand since the model will serve to encode existing biases behind a facade of legitimacy.

Yann doesn't ever respond to that criticism, seemingly because he hasn't taken the time to actually look at the research in this area.

So insofar as data is the root of the problem, yes. Insofar as the solution is to just use more representative data in the same systems, no. That doesn't fix things. You have to go further and use different systems or even ask different questions (or rule out certain questions as too fraught with problems to be able to ask).

[0]: https://twitter.com/ylecun/status/1203211859366576128

[1]: https://twitter.com/ylecun/status/1274782757907030016

[2]: https://twitter.com/ylecun/status/1275162732166361088

[3]: https://twitter.com/ylecun/status/1275167319157870592

[4]: https://twitter.com/hardmaru/status/1275214381509300224. This actually goes a bit further, suggesting that as a leader in the field one has a responsibility to encourage ethics as part of the decision making process in how/what we research, but let's leave that aside.

reply

zozbot234 5 hours ago [–]

> Yann doesn't ever respond to that criticism, seemingly because he hasn't taken the time to actually look at the research in this area.

No, that's still a problem with data in a broader sense. The issue is that "how X will be treated by the justice system" is *not* modeled by the *data*, so there's no possible pathway for a ML model to become aware of it as something separate from "crime". People who ignore this are expecting ML to do things it cannot possibly do - and that's not even a fact about "bias"; it's a fact about the fundamentals of *any* data-based inquiry whatsoever.

reply

joshuamorton 5 hours ago [–]

I hope you read to the end of my post where I address that:

> So insofar as data is the root of the problem, yes. Insofar as the solution is to just use more representative data in the same systems, no. That doesn't fix things.

Ultimately Yann's proposals are still to use "better data" whereas all the ethics people are (and have been) screaming no, you can't use better data because it doesn't exist. He doesn't acknowledge that.

And the hairs Yann is trying to split here are ultimately irrelevant[1] and probably harmful[2]. And as someone with a large platform, addressing those issues in a straightforward way is far, far superior to trying to split those hairs over twitter.

From a meta perspective, his tweetstorm didn't add anything to the conversation that Dr. Gebru and her collaborators aren't already aware of. Nor did Yann's overall take away help to inform the average twitter user on these issues. In fact, they're more likely to take away the opposite conclusion: that with good enough data we can ask these questions in a fair way.

But as you rightly conclude there are flaws in any data based inquiry. Yann doesn't concede that.

[1]: https://twitter.com/isbellHFh/status/1275184863159685121

[2]: https://twitter.com/hardmaru/status/1275088134238162944

reply

zozbot234 4 hours ago [–]

I'm not sure that Yann was trying to split hairs there. He was reasoning about the issue from first principles (e.g. the problem-domain vs. architecture vs. data distinction) and then failing to carry his reasoning thru to the reasonable conclusion that you mention re: the inherent flaws of any data-based modeling. Criticizing his take wrt. these issues is constructive; being careless about what his actual views are is not.

reply

CapriciousCptl 13 hours ago [–]

I don't even think he said "model's don't cause bias," he just said "ML systems are biased when data is biased."

reply

Palptine 6 hours ago [–]

I don't understand how people can defend his detractors in this particular case. Are you telling me that an image upsampling model that does not contain hard coded bias, and trained on unbiased data will produced biased result? Especially the kind of biased result represented by the error made by the original tweeter who fucked up?

reply

zozbot234 6 hours ago [–]

Just curious, but what "error" did the original tweeter make? Did anyone really expect the model to *accurately* reconstruct the original photo starting from a pixelated mess? That makes no sense to anyone with even a passing knowledge of ML. You're *always* going to get craploads of bias *and* variance (i.e. blatant inaccuracy, over and above the bias) in such a setting, even starting from "ideal, unbiased" data. The problem domain is at issue here.

reply

kofejnik 13 hours ago [–]

>>"Here is a story I heard from a friend, which I will alter slightly to protect the innocent. A prestigious psychology professor signed an open letter in which psychologists condemned belief in innate sex differences. My friend knew that this professor believed such differences existed, and asked him why he signed the letter. He said that he expected everyone else in his department would sign it, so it would look really bad if he didn't. My friend asked why he expected everyone else in his department to sign it, and he said "Probably for the same reason I did".

this post is no longer available, of course

reply

yesenadam 14 hours ago [–]

That made me think of an essay I often revisit, Emerson's *Self-Reliance* (1841):

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. ... For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure. And therefore a man must know how to estimate a sour face. The by-standers look askance on him in the public street or in the friend's parlour. If this aversation had its origin in contempt and resistance like his own, he might well go home with a sad countenance; but the sour faces of the multitude, like their sweet faces, have no deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs. Yet is the discontent of the multitude more formidable than that of the senate and the college. It is easy enough for a firm man who knows the world to brook the rage of the cultivated classes. Their rage is decorous and prudent, for they are timid as being very vulnerable themselves. But when to their feminine rage the indignation of the people is added, when the ignorant and the poor are aroused, when the unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society is made to growl and mow, it needs the habit of magnanimity and religion to treat it godlike as a trifle of no concernment. ...

The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency... Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day.—'Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.'—Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.

reply

throwaway894345 13 hours ago [–]

> To be great is to be misunderstood.

I would be content with being ordinary—permission to ask obvious questions about the narrative handed down from on high—without fear of defamation that costs me my livelihood.

reply

lhnz 13 hours ago [–]

The events of the last 4 years, make it clear to me that we are rapidly heading towards totalitarianism.

I finally understand the answer to the childhood question of "But, how could this every happen here?" that used to be an automatic response to being taught about awful events in history.

When there is extreme moral certainty about societal problems, people can feel that for the problems to be dealt with they will need to do away with reason, due process, and free speech. It becomes the prevailing wisdom. Everybody that confronts these beliefs in a critical manner is either deplatformed or too scared to speak.

By this point, the institutions and citizens are almost all in on it.

Whether or not you see this in the same way that I do, probably depends on whether you think that the NYT is doing this from ignorance or because they consider Scott's manner of confronting topical issues to be competing with their own narratives. I personally think that they are willfully trying to identify a dissenting voice, and that we are right at the beginning of western politics becoming extremely harsh with dissenting voices.

reply

enriquto 13 hours ago [–]

If you are a history nerd, reading what people wrote 90 years ago you will realize that we are exactly the same species, and our attitudes have not changed a bit. One of my favorite readings are the essays of french philosopher Simone Weil after two visits to germany in the thirties. She was concerned with the rise of the nazis, while at the same time describing the natural and understandable forces that were making them gain support.

I do not think that there is an analogy between the groups of then and the groups of today. Still, the "outrage" mechanisms that steer our will seem to be identical.

reply

lhnz 12 hours ago [–]

I've been heavily downvoted for suggesting that we're witnessing something dangerous.

It's not that I think I can predict the future, but even if it continues as-is we're witnessing a loss of fauna, and this could easily mutate to something truly terrible in the next decade.

The fact is Scott Alexander was my canary. If a compassionate, liberal-minded intellectual that carefully understands both sides of every issue doesn't find it safe to write online it's not safe for anybody outside of the dominant culture.

I really do hope that everything turns out alright, and thank you for the essay recommendation.

reply

vharuck 11 hours ago [–]

>The fact is Scott Alexander was my canary. If a compassionate, liberal-minded intellectual that carefully understands both sides of every issue doesn't find it safe to write online it's not safe for anybody outside of the dominant culture.

By that measure, it hasn't been safe since he started his blog. In the article, he explains why he's always used a name he hopes people cannot trace to him.

"Cancel culture" is worth discussing, but it's not the topic of the article. He gives one example of it in a long list of things peoplr have done when they dislike him for the blog and discovered his identity.

reply

▲ lhnz 10 hours ago [–]

```
> By that measure, it hasn't been safe since he
> started his blog. In the article, he explains
> why he's always used a name he hopes people
> cannot trace to him.
```

True. The reason I said that isn't related to what he has posted about needing anonymity to not harm his work.

I believe that the journalists unstated reason for wanting to demask him, is to coerce him into silence and to make it easier for mobs to form against him in future.

Basically, they are too smart to attack him directly, but have decided to paint a target on his back, and to leave the job to bloodier hands.

reply

▲ vharuck 9 hours ago [–]

I thought of a different and, in my view, more likely cause behind this story:

He was interviewed by a junior reporter (who else would be assigned an article about a blogger). This junior reporter is too scared or naive to break the NYT policy of "always use names." Maybe NYT's orientation sessions stressed this a lot, or maybe the reporter got chewed out for not using names before.

It is weird they weren't willing to leave out his name after Scott brought it up. But we do only have one side of the story right now, and it's only been a day. A secret vendetta is too far a leap for me right now.

reply

▲ xhkkffbf 7 hours ago [–]

Cade Metz is not a junior reporter. He's done great work at Wired and this isn't his first rodeo.

reply

▲ zaroth 11 hours ago [–]

A canary indeed. Except that instead of being the early warning, what we see here is the last person you would hope to succumb.

reply

▲ iAmAPencilYo 5 hours ago [–]

> One of my favorite readings are the essays of french philosopher Simone Weil after two visits to germany in the thirties. She was concerned with the rise of the nazis, while at the same time describing the natural and understandable forces that were making them gain support.

Could you point me to those essays? Would like to examine those!

reply

▲ gilbetron 7 hours ago [–]

> The events of the last 4 years, make it clear to me that we are rapidly heading towards totalitarianism.

Question is, what totalitarianism do you think we're headed towards? Trump/MAGA totalitarianism or Left/Cancel culture totalitarianism?

reply

▲ lhnz 6 hours ago [–]

Does it mattter which one?

Once we're there, power will be wielded fully by whatever popular sociopath has the rungs on any given day.

That can change day-to-day, year-to-year or election-to-election, and different organisations will have their own all-powerful sociopaths, with their own particular preferences for abuses of power.

Once people have power, they don't merely act ideologically, they act selfishly.

reply

▲ cousin_it 15 hours ago [–]

I've seen moral fashions. What's happening now is bigger, rarer and worse. It's known as a "purity spiral" (Haynes), "mass movement" (Hoffer), "political religion" (Voegelin).

reply

▲ esperent 13 hours ago [–]

Living outside the US and watching what's going on (ok, it's not just the US, but it is just a few countries) is like watching a friend's slow motion descent into madness. It's pitiful and sad, and I feel powerless to do anything about it.

At the same time, so long as I stay away from news and social media, I'm pretty much unaffected. Society in the various countries I've spent time in over the last few years (Ireland, Spain, Germany, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia are the main ones) seems much the same as ever.

reply

▲ nogabebop23 13 hours ago [–]

Well if you ignore the change that is reflected in what we call the news and social media of course society would seem the same, but that doesn't mean it's not changing. I agree that face-to-face interactions haven't deteriorated and may even be better than in the past, but the challenge is their share of communication and social interaction has dramatically shrunk.

reply

▲ LanceH 12 hours ago [–]

The biggest thing that has changed is that a comment from 15 years ago can be dredged up, taken out of context and used to brand someone unacceptable for employment forever. Of course, this is enforced selectively.

reply

▲ esperent 5 hours ago [–]

Right, but I've never heard of that happening except from US media.

reply

▲ esperent 12 hours ago [–]

I mean the overall health of society seems pretty much normal (corona excepted). Sure, people are talking more on social media than ten years ago. That doesn't seem to be a problem in an otherwise healthy society.

reply

▲ philwelch 2 hours ago [–]

Most of the discourse motivating what's going on is in the English language, so perhaps that's a factor.

reply

▲ dilandau 8 hours ago [–]

Is it a power-grab or an attempt by individuals to gain social status?

I think that it has all those trappings, but underneath is a deep addiction to anger, outrage and the rush of adrenaline that accompanies it.

There is also a sort of religiosity that your comment alludes to.

>Various thinkers have pointed out that leftism is a kind of religion. Leftism is not a religion in the strict sense because leftist doctrine does not postulate the existence of any supernatural being. But, for the leftist, leftism plays a psychological role much like that which religion plays for some people. The leftist NEEDS to believe in leftism; it plays a vital role in his psychological economy. His beliefs are not easily modified by logic or facts. He has a deep conviction that leftism is morally Right with a capital R, and that he has not only a right but a duty to impose leftist morality on everyone.

reply

▲ jahaja 5 hours ago [–]

The Unabomber, really? There's something disturbingly smug about thinking that one side is emotional to the point of religious and another side is logical and factual. Maybe it's time for some humbling introspection.

reply

▲ tomrod 14 hours ago [–]

It's unclear which country and which side of the spectrum you're referring to.

This is why I like to use science as a guide (not a decision point), for then there is a chance to be self-correcting.

reply

▲ enraged_camel 14 hours ago [–]

Why is this comment being downvoted?

reply

▲ pharke 14 hours ago [–]

It seems rather tangential and doesn't contribute anything. It is pretty clear which country is being referred to if we're staying on topic, just saying "I like to use science as a guide" is an almost empty statement. Which science? Psychology, sociology, physics? The scientific method? How? Do you mean reading the current literature? How are you applying it as a guide to the current topic under discussion? The comment they were replying to cited authors and relevant terminology which is a great contribution for people that want to read more on the subject. This comment just blurts out an opinion and then follows it up with what could be considered a thinly disguised jab. Hence the downvotes.

reply

▲ tomrod 13 hours ago [–]

I think it is because I attempted to be neutral and post the mental model I like to use (other commenter asked if scientific method and recent research and understanding. Answer to both is yes.).

reply

▲ nradov 13 hours ago [–]

Yes science can be a good guide. The trouble is that some left-wing social movements explicitly reject science (and Enlightenment values in general) as a tool of the oppressor. There are certain things you're not allowed to say regardless of scientific evidence. For one example, look what happened to scientific critics of Lysenkoism.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysenkoism#Effects

reply

▲ jasonvorhe 13 hours ago [–]

Like?

reply

▲ lghh 13 hours ago [–]

> left-wing social movements explicitly reject science (and Enlightenment values in general) as a tool of the oppressor

I have not seen this, at least on a large scale. Are there specific events you are referencing?

reply

▲ Consultant32452 13 hours ago [–]

I don't think "not on a large scale" is a good argument. Small groups of people can be incredibly powerful. The people who founded our country could all fit in the same room together.

reply

▲ lghh 12 hours ago [–]

Yeah but the people who found the United States were in much more powerful positions than some college students, for example.

reply

▲ Consultant32452 12 hours ago [–]

That argument is outdated by a decade or so. Sure, there's still some college students, but the ones from a decade ago now work in the big tech firms, NYT, etc.

reply

▲ rob74 13 hours ago [–]

I think it's currently more the right wing rejecting science (climate research, epidemiology etc.) as a tool of the "deep state"...

reply

▲ Ghjklov 13 hours ago [–]

Could be both. Both sides reject science wherever fits their goals :)

reply

▲ blaser-waffle 11 hours ago [–]

The left is certainly guilty of ignoring gun or crime statistics they don't want to hear, but it's totally disingenuous to compare them to folks in the hard right-wing camp, such as fundamentalist Christians or the hardcore climate deniers.

reply

▲ Ghjklov 10 hours ago [–]

All I know is that both of them are perfectly willing to discredit and throw science to the wind if it doesn't fit their needs. I hope the science community realizes this before they let themselves be used as pawns by politicians.

reply

▲ nradov 13 hours ago [–]

That is also a problem, but stems from a different cause. The right wing accepts the validity of the scientific method, but claims that biased left-wing scientists have intentionally published skewed results in a few limited areas like anthropomorphic global climate change. I don't agree with this interpretation and I think that climate change is the most serious threat to human civilization. But in countering destructive extremist movements from both sides it's important to understand the basis of their ideologies rather than just labeling them as "anti-science".

reply

▲ kerkeslager 12 hours ago [–]

I agree with your general point as to why some people are against science, but using an example *from before the second world war* to call out the left specifically is pretty off-base. An example from 1935-1940 in Soviet Russia has very little relevance to 2020 on an English-speaking forum.

Both sides of the spectrum have anti-scientific factions which are *current*: on the left there are deniers of gender differences and people who overstate the role of genetics in mental illness, on the right there are climate denyers, evolution deniers, people who think crime is prevented by more aggressive policing. Anti-vaxxers are fairly uniformly distributed across the political spectrum.

reply

▲ _wldu 15 hours ago [–]

Great post. I wish more people would genuinely listen to those they disagree with. When we shut people down or make them feel uncomfortable/threatened to the point that they won't speak, what have we gained?

reply

▲ Nextgrid 14 hours ago [–]

The problem is that it's a vicious circle. You can't attempt to understand/reason with someone going against societal norms otherwise you will be seen by your peers as agreeing with that person and thus ostracized because they themselves do not want to be seen as understanding/reasoning with someone (you) that now appears to be going against societal norms.

reply

▲ tosers4 14 hours ago [–]

this forum literally hides opinions people disagree with.

The up and down arrow are really bad icons for UX.

reply

▲ shawnz 14 hours ago [–]

I think the up and down arrows are perfect representations for what they do: "I want people to see this" vs "I don't want people to see this".

The problem is when someone believes that people shouldn't see any opinions that they disagree with. How do you stop them from downvoting substantive content? Personally I don't think changing the icons will help

reply

▲ s1artibartfast 10 hours ago [–]

I don't entirely agree. I think that upvote and a flag, placed elsewhere, would have a substantial difference.

reply

▲ shawnz 9 hours ago [–]

That implies to me that it is meant to be used for when the rules are broken (like the flag feature as it exists currently). But non-substantive content isn't necessarily rule-breaking

reply

▲ wrycoder 9 hours ago [–]

The [-] allows you to hide the most popular threads and dig for hidden gold. I do this often.

reply

▲ wycy 13 hours ago [–]

In my experience on HN, downvoted comments are almost exclusively low-effort, spammy, immature, etc. I'm not sure I've ever noticed an insightful dissenting comment downvoted here.

reply

▲ matwood 14 hours ago [–]

> I wish more people would genuinely listen to those they disagree with.

I had a bit of this discussion on HN not long ago. I love to debate and hear ideas from those I disagree with. But, that's not what people are often doing today. They are using your statement to appeal to others to listen and accept their clearly racist ideas or provable wrong, anti-science ideas.

IMO, it's intellectually dishonest and a debate I have a hard time continuing.

reply

▲ epr 13 hours ago [–]

> I love to debate and hear ideas from those I disagree with

The right may take the cake as far as hypocrisy goes in general, but the one thing that pisses me off the most about the left is their lip service to open-mindedness. I often wonder if they do in fact believe it themselves.

> They are using your statement to appeal to others to listen and accept their clearly racist ideas or provable wrong, anti-science ideas

With the continuously widening scope of what could be considered "racist" or "anti-science", I suppose there won't be much left to debate soon enough.

reply

▲ matwood 11 hours ago [–]

I don't know if you are implying that I'm from the left. I'm not either left or right, although as the right has moved righter I guess I have become relatively more left by staying in the middle :)

> With the continuously widening scope of what could be considered "racist" or "anti-science"

I agree this is a danger. But in my original comment, I'm referring to basics. Evidence has mounted that masks work, yet people still physically fight over wearing one. Evidence has mounted (IMO overwhelmingly) that HCQ does not work and is even dangerous, yet people keep saying that's all they need to survive COVID. Then there are the anti-vaxxers. It's a concern that even after a vaccine is found, it's possible not enough people will even get the vaccine to reach herd immunity[1].

[1] https://www.snopes.com/news/2020/05/04/a-majority-of-vaccine...

reply

▲ wrycoder 9 hours ago [–]

IMHO, the left has moved at least as far left as the right has moved to the right. The polarization has increased markedly. The other change is the vast increase in the speed of interaction and the number of vocal, anonymous individuals involved. There’s no time for reflection anymore.

reply

▲ wrycoder 9 hours ago [–]

Regarding HCQ, it’s only useful in combination with zinc, and only useful before hospitalization. The studies often cited seem to studiously ignore this. Given those caveats, there have been many successes.

reply

▲ matwood 8 hours ago [–]

Successful valid studies? This summarizes the issues with all the earlier studies, even ones with zinc [1].

The problem with all the success anecdotes is correlation does not mean causation. The odds are low that I'm going to walk outside and die. If I walk outside while picking my nose and don't die, it doesn't mean picking my nose is stopping my death. The large majority of people recover from COVID doing nothing at all. Finding efficacy of any drug requires controlled studies.

[1] https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/miracle-cure-testimonials-a...

reply

▲ wrycoder 5 hours ago [–]

Well, looking at that article, it appears the author is out to debunk HCQ. The language is hyperbolic - when I see something like that, I don't give it much credence.

For an alternate take from the blogosphere,

https://scienceblog.com/516960/suppression-of-chloroquine-is...

I've been following HCQ/Zinc long before it got politicized.

It's well known that covid is a disaster in nursing homes, often resulting in 30% deaths. Here's some anecdotal evidence of early treatment with HCQ in that setting:

https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/texas-e...

Here's a journal article claiming positive results. It's had over 300 citations, so there's probably some interesting reading there:

https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/bst/14/1/14_2020.01047/...

Causation generally requires some theory to support it:

https://www.jewishpress.com/news/us-news/ny/scientists-study...

I'm 78, so I'm paying attention. Here's the best guidance I've seen so far. (They have backed off on HCQ because of all the political flap.)

https://www.evms.edu/covid-19/covid_care_for_clinicians/#cov...

reply

▲ zadokshi 13 hours ago [–]

> They are using your statement to appeal to others to listen and accept their clearly racist ideas or provable wrong, anti-science ideas.

“Yes clearly other people are stupid. The only ideas that should be exposed to the public are my own ideas. People other than myself apparently don’t have functioning brains, or they would all think what I think. So instead I must fight to have all opposing ideas erased.”

reply

▲ matwood 11 hours ago [–]

Not even close. People have to start with a shared foundation to have a discussion. Agreeing that 1+1=2 is a start. How about agreeing that the earth is round? Agreeing that critiquing research, and *gasp* changing our minds when the evidence mounts is the goal. Let's pick a weirdly controversial topic - masks. Evidence is mounting/has mounted that masks work, yet people want to fight over wearing one.

reply

▲ antepodius 9 hours ago [–]

They want to fight over wearing one because they don't want to bow to their tribal enemies. It doesn't actually matter whether the masks work or not.

reply

▲ antepodius 14 hours ago [–]

That's what it means to truly disagree with someone- to hate them.

Your policy is still the one that brought us down this path, and will (or has) plunge the western public into a debilitating purity spiral, as the overton windows shrinks and more and more viewpoints become 'clearly x-ist' or 'provably wrong', according to the crowd.

Good! Let it all burn.

reply

mc_blue 13 hours ago [–]

Could you explain what you mean by true disagreement with someone is equivalent to hating them?

reply

antepodius 10 hours ago [–]

From the gp comment: >They are using your statement to appeal to others to listen and accept their clearly racist ideas or provable wrong, anti-science ideas.

The people he's talking about are beyond the pale. He's fine disagreeing with people, he even likes to have his point of view challenged- it's just that these people are a step too far; they're not just wrong- they're evil.

An answer is: I've found the people you ACTUALLY disagree with. Insofar as you can be said to hate anyone, it's the people you would gladly exterminate- and feel good doing so. Disagreement with someone on a matter of import automatically causes some small amount of dislike for them. You can still like someone overall! But if they're a great person, except e.g. they think abortion should be illegal, you'll still think less of them than you would have otherwise. My argument is that this dislike scales with how much you disagree with someone; and so, all else being equal, the people you hate most are the ones you disagree with the most strongly- to the point that a will awakes in you to engage against them in righteous wrath.

You see it in the twitter mobs and the witch hunts of old: If people decided to crucify someone, say by going after their livelihood- if, somehow, they thought that was the best way to improve the world- they should do it with their eyes down, shaking their heads, crying "If only it didn't have to come to this- but if we didn't do this, you would have caused even more pain than we. This course of action is a tragedy; but any other would have been worse. Forgive us, but for the good of the nation, you have to die."

They don't- they go after people with glee. It's fun, it's exhilarating; it's a fox-hunt. You can read it in people's testimonials about being part of a twitter job-lynchmob: Everyone enjoys it till they're the one on the chopping block!

Real Disagreement, as I would call it, is that kind that honestly provokes the aforementioned emotion: the desire to see someone destitute and homeless, if not dead, and the frame of mind where you could look at the result with pride. I'd call that hate.

(You can hate people for other reasons, of course.)

reply

throwaway894345 13 hours ago [–]

> They are using your statement to appeal to others to listen and accept their clearly racist ideas or provable wrong, anti-science ideas.

I don’t think anyone is appealing to others to listen to their racist, anti-science ideas so much as demanding that they be accepted and if not a mob may be sent after them. I wish it were only “appeals to listen”.

reply

throwaway4666 14 hours ago [–]

Yeah whenever people on here allude to 'what you can't say' it usually boils down to the same few very specific ideas, none of which are particularly secret, original or new. Hell, if you're a tenured professor, billionaire or anyone in a position of power whining about 'what you can't say' I find it hard to take you seriously.

reply

bitcurious 13 hours ago [–]

People are getting fired and publicly shamed for statements and actions made one, two decades ago. It’s entirely reasonable to be afraid of speaking something acceptable but unpopular today out of fear that it will be unacceptable tomorrow.

reply

matwood 11 hours ago [–]

This is a good point. Historical context can be important. You see these issues with people who have been in the public for a very long time (often politicians).

We also saw this with the ok sign where people were digging up pictures of people from years ago and somehow connecting them to using racism through the ok sign. It's challenging for a person who isn't on top of every news story to navigate this time.

reply

antepodius 14 hours ago [–]

Even if they're not too afraid for themselves, they might be for other people in more tenuous positions than them.

reply

throwaway4666 13 hours ago [–]

Ah, I get it. In a way, the Pioneer Fund is more of a charity.

reply

cm2187 14 hours ago [–]

For me rather the film Good Night, and Good Luck (2005), we are going through the McCarty years again.

reply

brightball 12 hours ago [–]

There’s a lot of things I’d like to blog about that I hesitate to do because I realize that no matter what I say, the topics alone will evoke a reaction from people.

reply

nradov 14 hours ago [–]

Left-wing social movements, while initially well intentioned, tend to eat their own in escalating purity spirals. Total ideological purity is demanded, and valued above competence or actual results. The apotheosis tends to be something like Communist "self-criticism" sessions where people are forced to confess their thought crimes.

https://unherd.com/2020/01/cast-out-how-knitting-fell-into-a...

reply

▲ dragonwriter 13 hours ago [–]

> Left-wing social movements, while initially well intentioned, tend to eat their own in escalating purity spirals.

That's not particularly true of left-wing movements; to the extent it's true of them it's also true of right-wing movements. The relevant factors are orthogonal to the left-right axis.

reply

▲ cambalache 13 hours ago [–]

Except it is, and not because "leftists" are bad or anything. I consider myself a leftist. It is because leftism promotes a resistance and challenging to authority and a prior belief in the goodness of the downtrodden masses. None of those are wrong per se, they are even healthy, but when they are perverted and distorted they can easily led to circuses like the cultural revolution in China. Right-wing ideologies usually promote submission to authority and traditionalism. The problems that come with excesses in that front are of a different kind.

reply

▲ dragonwriter 13 hours ago [–]

> Except it is,

No, it's not.

> It is because leftism promotes a resistance and challenging to authority and a prior belief in the goodness of the downtrodden masses

I could with as much, justification say it is particularly associated with right-wing movements because the right promotes a rigid adherence to rules and authority, which devolves under pressure into seeking out non-adherence with progressively finer and finer combs.

> Right-wing ideologies usually promote submission to authority and traditionalism. The problems that come with excesses in that front are of a different kind.

Maybe in some other aspects, but a cycle of eating their own under pressure is not a point on which there is a difference. The left perhaps has more contribution from “people that were on the factions side before it gained power become genuinely opposed once it started executing power” and the right perhaps more from genuine intolerance for even the slightest deviation, but they both definitely experience it.

reply

▲ Consultant32452 12 hours ago [–]

The difference between left right and right wing movements is that the right has sort of agreed on an outer bound for how far right is too far. It looks something like political/national racial purity. Once people start spouting that, they tend to be removed from polite conversation. There is no similar outer bound on the left. There is nothing you can support that's so far left you will be expunged from polite society.

reply

▲ dragonwriter 11 hours ago [–]

> The difference between left right and right wing movements is that the right has sort of agreed on an outer bound for how far right is too far.

Heh. Is that a joke?

> It looks something like political/national racial purity. Once people start spouting that, they tend to be removed from polite conversation.

Yeah, the American Right has really marginalized Donald Trump, Stephen Miller, et al.

> There is no similar outer bound on the left

Really? Which of the following statements will get you excluded from public political dialogue in the US)

“Europeans did Africans a favor by bringing them to America as slaves”

Or

“Capitalist ownership of the means of production is a root of injustice and fundamentally incompatible with democracy”

(One of these has been prominently made by prominent voices on one side of the spectrum without repercussion, while people are routinely excluded for statements for more moderate than the other. At least in the US, to the extent anything vaguely resembling your point is true, it's exactly the reverse of the split you've proposed.)

reply

▲ 205guy 1 hour ago [–]

The African-American slave statement was recently made on one of the open discussion threads of SSC blog in question. I was fairly shocked by it (I didn’t know it was a common topic), first trying to see if it was meant ironically (no, it seemed to be meant seriously), then expecting the regular “rationalists” to tear the arguments apart. But none did, and the statement stood unchallenged—to be fair, the recent open threads had thousands of comments and so it may have gone unnoticed. I was actually going to see if that thread had any replies when I found the blog was deleted, and I honestly wondered if that wasn’t the reason.

The discussions on SSC were often intellectual and rationality-based, but a lot of the super-commenters were right-leaning. Left-leaning commenters were more scarce, and even benefitted from some affirmative-action less-strict moderation to encourage them to sick around. In fact, after the recent BLM protests, a new user showed up to argue and explain the social justice position, and did so respectfully and was well-received.

But I think a lot of the regulars had their blind spots. So many arguments were essentially: since A is true, B and C are the logical conclusions, but often nobody questioned A, let alone tested it—the rationality was often superficial. A popular format on the open threads (thus I’m characterizing the blog readers and commentariat, not the blog author) was impossible hypotheticals leading to un-provable speculation. Questions like what would’ve happened if Germany in WW2 had such-or-such a weapon. The format was even codified in the format of friendly aliens offering some weird bargain (take a pill to sleep 12hrs a day—or never need sleep but always be tired), then asking people what they would do or how that would change things. Fun thought problems, but so disconnected from reality or practical thought—essentially nerd-sniping (to use an admittedly uncharitable term).

Tl;DR: SSC was a mixed bag, but mostly civil and well-intentioned.

reply

▲ Consultant32452 10 hours ago [–]

> Yeah, the American Right has really marginalized Donald Trump, Stephen Miller, et al.

The fact that Trump is what you think passes for an ethno-nationalist these days is all the evidence needed to demonstrate my point.

>"Europeans did Africans a favor by bringing them to America as slaves"

This is a pretty gross thing to say, but it's not ethno-nationalism. Words have meaning for a reason.

>"Capitalist ownership of the means of production is a root of injustice and fundamentally incompatible with democracy"

The most popular politician in our country a couple years ago, and perhaps still today, is the open socialist Bernie Sanders.

reply

igorkraw 11 hours ago [–]

Can you give an example?I think this is probably country dependent (I'm from Europe) but in my experience calling yourself "communist" or even just agitating for democratic control over means of production is enough to be "canceled" in the sense that most large employers will be wary to higher you and our mainstream media will lump you in with Stalin. And that is in Europe, on the US I have less experience but I think until Bernie I wasn't aware of *any* visible socialist in the US.

Meanwhile, from my perspective, we Europeans lookt at North America and see a lot of racists, transphobes and anti-poor agitators complaining about being cancelled *on national Media* and *while giving speeches at universities* (e.g. fox news, Jordan Peterson). Which feels...off.

reply

Consultant32452 10 hours ago [–]

>Can you give an example?

Sure, one easy way of gauging this phenomenon is the social response to the swastika compared to the hammer and sickle.

Another is that the biggest ethno-nationalist gathering in decades in the US was a few years ago, tragically someone was run over by a vehicle. There were only hundreds of people there. The next year they tried to hold another rally and only dozens showed up.

>Meanwhile, from my perspective, we Europeans lookt at North America and see a lot of racists, transphobes and anti-poor agitators complaining about being cancelled on national Media and while giving speeches at universities (e.g. fox news, Jordan Peterson). Which feels...off.

The business model of the corporate press is to fill your heart with fear, so that you will watch/click/share/etc. A great example of this phenomenon is the "Fine People Hoax." You might recall there was a major news story claiming that Trump called white nationalists "fine people." Except if you read the transcript he clearly states, in the same breath as the words "fine people," and without prompting, that white nationalists should be condemned totally. These types of things happen over and over again.

reply

igorkraw 6 hours ago [–]

Erm, are you you talking about the Charleston rally in which a Neonazi ran over counter protestors? And if yes,are you saying it's a *bad* thing less people showed up to sing "Jews will not replace us" the year after?

And regarding the symbolism...I can kinda see that example, maybe, but I generally don't see the hammer and sickle used in mainstream politics either. And even then, there is a line between something like the hammer and sickle which was used before and after Lenin/Stalin as a symbol vs. the swastika which was literally designed by Nazis and only ever used by them (the Buddhist one is slightly different)

If anyone directly sympathises with Stalin/Lenin and calling for dekulakhisation, I'd expect that to also remove them from polite conversation. It just seems to happen less ?

reply

Consultant32452 4 hours ago [–]

>Erm, are you you talking about the Charleston rally in which a Neonazi ran over counter protestors? And if yes,are you saying it's a bad thing less people showed up to sing "Jews will not replace us" the year after?

My point is that there is not widespread public support for this tiny group of awful people. The fact that so few people showed up is evidence of that. These people went "too far right" and were abandoned, as they should be.

>If anyone directly sympathises with Stalin/Lenin and calling for dekulakhisation, I'd expect that to also remove them from polite conversation. It just seems to happen less ?

AOC tweeted Marx's Labor Theory of Value. Bernie Sanders, recently the most popular politician in the country is an open Socialist. Michael Moore can openly/publicly support and wish Happy Birthday to Marx. Can you actually name an instance where a person went so far left that they were canceled?

reply

kofejnik 10 hours ago [–]

> calling yourself "communist" or even just agitating for democratic control over means of production is enough to be "canceled" in the sense that most large employers will be wary to higher you and our mainstream media will lump you in with Stalin.

calling yourself 'nazi' will have the same consequences, so I don't see what is the problem here, communism is every step as bad as nazism (source: born in USSR)

reply

igorkraw 6 hours ago [–]

There is a difference between communist and Stalinist/Leninist though. Calling yourself a nationalist Vs a Nazi seems to warrant that distinction in most countries

reply

kofejnik 3 hours ago [–]

> There is a difference between communist and Stalinist/Leninist though

only to communists, maybe. From where I stand, Leninism/Stalinism/Trotskism/other -ism are all extreme totalitarian ideologies

reply

Consultant32452 9 hours ago [–]

It's simply not true that communists are canceled. The media regularly openly supports the CCP. The most popular politician in our country as of a couple years ago was open socialist Bernie Sanders. Wearing a swastika is an insta-cancel. Wearing a hammer and sickle gets you a "I wouldn't vote for that guy... maybe."

reply

EamonnMR 5 hours ago [–]

I would say that there is a wide gulf between wanting to make sure people have healthcare (Sanders's big position) and the violent revolution and subsequent authoritarianism that Communism tends to require.

reply

Consultant32452 4 hours ago [–]

I feel like all of this is avoiding the point. If there is such a place on the left that is "too far left" that you will be insta-canceled, what is it? Please provide an example of this happening to a public figure.

reply

igorkraw 5 hours ago [–]

Well, one symbol is inherently tied to racial purity politics, the other is a symbol which was used by communists both before and after the atrocities committed by Stalin/Lenin/etc. Is that not a difference?

reply

Consultant32452 4 hours ago [–]

I'm going to grant you every inch of that. Now please give me an example of a public person who went so far left that they were canceled and are no longer welcome in polite conversation.

reply

entropyneur 14 hours ago [–]

I love "What You Can't Say" and have incorporated the conformist test into my moral compass. But I think the shift to use of shame for society regulation is a positive development. I'd much rather be downvoted on HN or called names on Twitter than beaten up or deprived of freedom. But maybe that's just me.

reply

zozbot234 14 hours ago [–]

> But I think the shift to use of shame for society regulation is a positive development. I'd much rather be downvoted on HN or called names on Twitter than beaten up or deprived of freedom.

It's easy to require due process prior to anyone being deprived of freedom, and we generally see this as a positive development, compared to the alternative. Using "shame" (aka witch hunts, cyber bullying and the like) to punish unwelcome views is the opposite of due process.

reply

entropyneur 14 hours ago [–]

It's not easy at all. Even in a democratic country with highly functional legal system like the US due process is not available to many (e.g. George Floyd).

Also my idea of shame doesn't include death threats let alone more extreme things like swatting.

reply

antepodius 14 hours ago [–]

It's the impulse that's lead to more shaming that's also pushing to make the police come and arrest you for saying offensive things- at least, this is already the case in europe.

And why not swat someone? If you're going to go after their livelihood and try to stop them from ever having a job again, you're half killing them anyway. People murder each other for less. Be honest and just have their dog shot already ;)

reply

raxxorrax 11 hours ago [–]

It is certainly no positive development. Shame requires a central authority or is based on the minimal consensus of the majority of society. I wouldn't recommend it. To regulate society, we have laws. Far better and objective system. Doesn't protect you from social prosecution which is restricted to people with a public or know persona on Twitter as it seems. There are also pretty shameless people.

reply

kofejnik 12 hours ago [–]

does it include losing your job for wrongthink?

reply

rbrtl 14 hours ago [–]

You are pretty far from the mark here... A study as far back as 2002 recognised the US as an oligarchy — i.e. not a democracy. And to call their legal/judicial systems or process “highly functional” is also pretty laughable.

George Floyd shouldn’t have come into the line of fire of these systems, he was an innocent man. The fact that it was and is so difficult to prosecute the responsible officer shows how dysfunctional the system is.

Using shame as a system of justice relies on emotional charge at the point of infraction. I would argue that’s how mob justice starts, not how we end injustice.

reply

entropyneur 13 hours ago [–]

Re the US: I only meant that comparatively. Most of the people in the world can only dream of living under a system as good as yours. And for us violent regulation of expression is the norm.

I hear you. The shame-based system is prone to be unjust. TBH, I also think the people pioneering it are wrong about most things. I guess what I'm trying to say is that *any* violent regulation of expression is unjust, so even if shame-justice is on point 10% of the time it's still an improvement. And in the cases when it's wrong the consequences are less severe.

reply

▲ rbrtl 12 hours ago [–]

I had - without questioning it - assumed you were commenting from a Western Democracy yourself. It is beautifully eye-opening to be confronted with my own bias so starkly. In fact, I am British, and I think our system has many of the same issues as that of the US. Of course we have our own issues, mostly stemming from what I perceive as a delicate sensibility which is pervasive in British society, and is the subject of decades of jokes at our expense.

I wrote, and rewrote the rest of this comment 3 times, before I gave up, and started from the top of the thread again. Now I have decided to stop exhausting myself over what might be acceptable to an indefinable demographic (HN commenters reading this individual thread) for me to say.

reply

▲ antepodius 9 hours ago [–]

But over here, we're not moving from the government hurting you for your speech to people shaming you. We moving from less hurt/shame in total to more shame in total. If the 2nd amendment didn't exist, the us would also have more government punishments for speech now than it did before- because that's what the people shaming want.

reply

▲ criddell 13 hours ago [–]

If somebody is saying hurtful things, what's the due process to address that? Before the digital age, didn't we always manage that kind of thing through a type of social contract?

reply

▲ noelsusman 13 hours ago [–]

Regulating speech via social means is strongly preferable to regulating speech via legal means, in my opinion.

reply

▲ kofejnik 10 hours ago [–]

strongly disagree; it is mostly universally agreed that regulating crime via society means (i.e. lynch mobs) is bad; same applies to speech, I believe

reply

▲ DuskStar 14 hours ago [–]

> I'd much rather be downvoted on HN or called names on Twitter than beaten up or deprived of freedom.

This blog post is literally about someone fearing that it'll escalate to "beaten up" or "fired" if their name is published.

reply

▲ entropyneur 14 hours ago [–]

Yeah, my comment was only in reference to this subthread.

reply

▲ cambalache 13 hours ago [–]

How about you and your partner being fired from your job because your 13 year old wrote 1 year ago in Instagram : "Guacamole nigga penis". Is that shame treatment good enough or you prefer it more severe?

reply

▲ geodel 12 hours ago [–]

Well as far as our rational, atheist and activists who believe in 'science' go something more severe is absolutely required to clean earth off these scums.

reply

▲ raxxorrax 11 hours ago [–]

An important bit is that it must be restricted to US sensibilities without any regard to other cultures. The woke are the true patriots here.

reply

▲ lliamander 8 hours ago [–]

It's not simply being called names (though that can cause some level of psychological distress). The big concern is economic consequences. People are losing their jobs, losing access to the platforms their customers are using, being canceled by payment services, etc.

There's also some level of physical safety concerns as well, but (as of yet) that's not as big of a concern.

reply

▲ josinalvo 13 hours ago [–]

Maybe it is like police and tasers?

In theory, tasers are good because they can substitute shooting.

In practice, you had 5 shootings, and now you have 4 shootings and 200 taser uses

reply

▲ jki275 13 hours ago [–]

I get the overall point you're trying to make, but for the person who was going to be that #5 shooting and gets to live instead, that's a positive outcome for that person at least.

Overall there's certainly a larger discussion about the use of force, and maybe tasers contribute to that in some negative ways, but most of the time they're used everybody gets to live at the end of the day.

reply

▲ antepodius 8 hours ago [–]

You shoot 200 people with tasers, a few are going to die.

You get 200 people fired from their jobs and make it hard for them to get employment elsewhere, a few are going to kill themselves. (Or see if they can get revenge first.)

reply

▲ jki275 8 hours ago [–]

We're arguing over made up numbers here.

reply

sbuttgereit 14 hours ago [–]

Luckily, one can never lead to the other.

reply

entropyneur 14 hours ago [–]

It's irrelevant whether one thing *can* lead to the other. What's important is how often it does. If there's significantly less violence, it's a win.

I guess it could be a bit difficult to see from the US where you had the first amendment forever. But the rest of the world is not like that.

reply

textgel 13 hours ago [–]

The claim that cancel cultures appearance is single handedly responsible for a drop in violence that was entirely the fault of a more permissive attitude towards open debate seems quite a stretch to put it as politely as possible.

reply

entropyneur 13 hours ago [–]

Are you implying it's a claim I've made? Because it isn't.

On the contrary, my claim is that if you take the world as a whole there has never been more permissive attitude towards open debate than today. But even in the so-called free world... Compare the treatment of JK Rowling got to the treatment MLK got.

reply

textgel 13 hours ago [–]

> But I think the shift to use of shame for society regulation is a positive development

> If there's significantly less violence, it's a win.

Don't try and back away from your claims once you've made them.

And taking this debate from the point of view of the world as a whole is disingenuous, don't try to latch the damage done by one onto the overall good done by others and claim a net good for the first who caused the damage.

Also we aren't comparing now to the 1960s; yes now looks fabulous compared to then as does it compared to the purges in the USSR but we arent comparing those; we're discussing the recent devolution in free expression as pointed out in the blog this post is about.

reply

entropyneur 12 hours ago [–]

> violence that was entirely the fault of a more permissive attitude towards open debate

Where did I say anything that can even remotely be interpreted this way?

Whether you think it's appropriate or not, I wasn't referring to the blog post. I also don't think it's what the blog post is about: Scott is worried about his patients knowing his political views interfering with his work as well as death threats, none of which has anything to do with shame.

Where I live cancel culture coexists with violent regulation of expression. I'm not sufficiently familiar with the US history but I doubt that whatever golden age you have in mind was sufficiently long even if it existed. Larry Flint was shot in '78 so that leaves 30 years max if that.

reply

textgel 12 hours ago [–]

You claimed these new shaming tactics lead to less violence as I have quoted above. Shaming tactics are the diametric opposite of debate, it is fundamentally zero sum; you support them, you oppose the other and you equated their growth with a reduction in violence; again I have quoted this.

Now perhaps I overshot the gun and we could state that your interpretation of shamming tactics was something else but right now they have a very public face so you'll have to specify if you mean something else.

This blog post is a symptom of the lean towards shaming tactics over debate; the problem has evolved to the point that scott has to worry about his career being destroyed because of it.

And re times, how about the 2000s then? we built and debated online without the need to destroy one another's lives because of the POV we took on a political argument.

reply

hindsightbias 11 hours ago [–]

Bruises heal and prisons have limited terms. Twitter lasts forever.

reply

stefantalpalaru 12 hours ago [–]

> I'd much rather be downvoted on HN

Would you also like being hellbanned on HN?

reply

dilandau 15 hours ago [–]

Both of those are right on point, and match my observations within my own circles. For me stallmans cancellation was a big turning point. I'm using a pseudonym everywhere now. I can't risk someone pulling up a comment or post years from now and using it to ruin my reputation or career, simply because i may have voiced an unpopular or controversial opinion that did not age well.

It seems, too, that making jokes is very risky. With text online it's just far too easy to take something out of context and misrepresent or weaponize a person's words. I have had this happen to me personally and it's unbelievably frustrating.

People aren't allowed to make mistakes, it seems. It is just too fraught, and even sincerity and honesty are not safe.

reply

apatters 14 hours ago [–]

It's undoubtedly more dangerous to be critical of the mainstream narrative now than it was 10-20 years ago.

There's an alt right author called Vox Day (and I'm a little afraid to be referencing him here) who makes the following argument: if mainstream thought becomes increasingly constricted, and disagreeing with it becomes increasingly dangerous, people will do one of two things. Either they'll self-censor, or they'll "flip the switch" and just go totally anti-mainstream, because it's safer to associate and identify with people who won't get them fired for their opinions. The greater the censorship and fear, the more people will "flip" in a search for safety.

Now he is alt right and he has a vested interest in portraying the ascendancy of the alt right as inevitable, but the point is nonetheless logical, and quite disturbing. It may be that punishing moderately "wrong" speech will ultimately drive moderates into the waiting arms of the extreme right, where they won't be judged so harshly for their errors. Moreover if the purity spiral [1] theory is correct, this phenomenon may be hard to stop, because punishing people for their dissenting speech is an effective way to gain status in many communities!

[1] https://unherd.com/2020/01/cast-out-how-knitting-fell-into-a...

reply

war1025 14 hours ago [–]

> Either they'll self-censor, or they'll "flip the switch" and just go totally anti-mainstream

I wouldn't call myself alt-right, far from it in fact. But I definitely see this happening in me over the past few years. Starting the night of the 2016 election.

It's one of those things that makes me wonder how much I've changed vs how much society has changed around me.

For instance, I learned first thing this morning that I have a corrupt faith and that I've fractured the nation [1]. There's only so much debasement one can listen to before you just tune out.

[1] https://www.npr.org/2020/06/23/881992622/book-jesus-and-john...

reply

wincy 13 hours ago [–]

I've listened to NPR my entire adult life but now it feels like I'm listening to the liberal version of The 700 Club.

reply

blaser-waffle 13 hours ago [–]

Aye, same. I was a Bernie voter before it was cool, and now it feels like I'm being beaten over the head with left-wing propaganda daily.

Given that we're less than 6 months out from an election -- *the election* -- it's not a surprise. Lots of propaganda, foreign and domestic, is going to go hard all summer.

See also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overton_window

reply

philwelch 2 hours ago [–]

Maybe not from NPR, but it's hard not to see a cynical motive here. If you incite more and more escalation, you get more violence and unrest which means more clicks and views.

reply

bregma 14 hours ago [–]

> It's undoubtedly more dangerous to be critical of the mainstream narrative now than it was 10-20 years ago.

I have observed that in the last 10-20 years the definition of "mainstream" has come to mean something very personal and subjective. Some media are referred to as "mainstream" only if they offer a supporting bias, and others are labelled "mainstream" only if they have demonstrated disagreement, depending on your ask. The epithet "mainstream media" has become a brush with which one may paint a canvas any colour one desires to forward one's peculiar viewpoint. It is a phrase that has become as meaningless as "political", "science", and even "unbiased". Just another empty adjective to lend pseudo-credence to your opinion.

reply

speeder 14 hours ago [–]

I had a bad experience with this yesterday.

My country right now is deeply divided between literal left (not USA left, I mean actual marxists) and "right" (almost noone support true rightwing, either in historical sense, being monarchists, or in the current sense, being capitalists, what they support instead is a populist authoritarian way of doing things, more in common with left than with any kind of right).

I now have to be very careful with who I talk to, often whatever I say spark trouble because where I live most people are marxists, and I am ex-marxist.

So I decided yesterday to talk with people in an whatsapp group that is anti-marxist... instead found myself having to be careful and self-censor because they went all the way to the other side, hard, people there were mad our former justice minister praised the army honor... because to them, that is evil, what he should be praising is the army might, as soon I touched on the subject it sparked hostile rants against anyone that believes that a violent army-backed coup is wrong, in a chillingly civil way, they explained to me that the army job is basically kill people in the government until it obeys the majority of the population, basically a literal dictatorship of the majority.

It became obvious then... I won't find a place to talk about my now somehow "moderate" views.

reply

mongol 7 hours ago [–]

I think there must be a place "outside" where you can talk about it. Somewhere were people do not know the facts of your country and so on. And have less bias about it.

reply

peroporque 12 hours ago [–]

Just a thought, but... a WhatsApp group full of crazy people may not be an ideal place to have a reason based discussion.

reply

war1025 10 hours ago [–]

> There's an alt right author called Vox Day

Went down a strange rabbit hole there for a while this morning after reading this. Ready to come back up for air now and put that behind me a while.

reply

throwawaylolx 15 hours ago [–]

It's not just commenting--it's any interaction at all:

https://old.reddit.com/r/WatchRedditDie/comments/hddnml/the_...

reply

Izkata 10 hours ago [–]

> People aren't allowed to make mistakes, it seems.

Not even mistakes. Things that were considered progressive as little as 15-20 years ago have now been flipped into "microaggressions".

reply

HideousKojima 5 hours ago [–]

The most infuriating to me is that educational curriculum drilled into people's heads that color blindness and treating all people equally was the key to ending racism, and now there's been a complete 180 on that

reply

war1025 14 hours ago [–]

> I'm using a pseudonym everywhere now.

I've wondered a couple times recently how dangerous it is that I'm easily discoverable. I tell myself that since I live in the Midwest, the worst of it hasn't reached here yet. Hopefully it doesn't come to that.

reply

ghaff 14 hours ago [–]

Per a comment up-thread, I wouldn't place too big a bet on pseudonyms remaining pseudonyms forever. Sure, absent a real effort to unmask you, you'll *probably* be fine. But sustained efforts to figure out pseudonymous identities often succeed.

reply

thatguy0900 7 hours ago [–]

It won't even need a sustained effort once ai gets somewhat decent at analysing writing patterns. I don't think it will really matter if it's even that accurate, really, like it doesn't really matter to the police how accurate facial scanners are people who are looking for troublemakers will go with it anyway.

reply

projektfu 15 hours ago [–]

You have to make giant, sweeping mistakes a part of your career or personality. Rush Limbaugh lost one tangential job, but is still influential and wealthy.

reply

dilandau 15 hours ago [–]

Or make a private joke to your friend about a dongle.

reply

projektfu 13 hours ago [–]

Did that work out well for him in the end?

reply

dilandau 13 hours ago [–]

No I would not say it did. Being publicly shamed, kicked out of a conference, fired, and having your name posted all over the place are the kinds of things that tend to stay with you. Remember, we're talking about a stupid dick joke between friends.

reply

ghaff 13 hours ago [–]

The whole thing got way out of hand and I'm sure it was very stressful. On the other hand, I understand he had a new job in short order. (On still the other hand, the person who kicked the whole thing off was also fired and AFAIK was basically locked out of the industry--at least in any public role.)

reply

blaser-waffle 13 hours ago [–]

explain

reply

ls612 8 hours ago [–]

Several years ago two guys (who iirc were friends and there together) were at some industry conference and one whispered to the other a suggestive joke about dongles. A woman (who I believe was a complete stranger to both of them) was sitting a few rows back and heard them and posted on Twitter how these guys were horrible misogynists and etc and got the Twitter mob to attack them.

reply

smnrchrds 8 hours ago [–]

https://arstechnica.com/staff/2013/03/donglegate-is-classic-...

https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=5391667

reply

enriquto 13 hours ago [–]

> Three years ago she argued that the smartest people are silencing themselves (...) which serves to consolidate power with insiders – those who are already powerful.

Wow. I couldn't imagine that a person from the USA, of all places, could made so nonchalantly the equivalence smarts=power (unless there is a level of sarcasm on this essay that escapes me). There's such a lack of self-awareness in the american elite if they are bona-fide capable of sprouting such bullshit without realizing what they say.

reply

john-shaffer 12 hours ago [–]

It seems that by "smart" she meant "knowledgeable", in particular about how things work in her field. Of course people at the top know more (on average) about how the industry works. They are in a position to know.

reply

▲ artsyca 15 hours ago [–]

I'd say this forum is exactly this. How often have I self censored because I just don't want the downvotes?

reply

▲ war1025 14 hours ago [–]

I read somewhere that downvotes are capped to -4 and it made me much less likely to self-censor when I felt like I had a valid point.

I know that the people who disagree with me outnumber those that agree, but the way that the upvotes bounce up and down tells me there are more people out there that agree with me than I would have assumed.

(Plus I think I've only made it down to -4 once or twice)

reply

▲ chrisweekly 14 hours ago [–]

There have been many times when I wanted to use my upvoting ability to unhide a comment that has some merit. To that end, I wish I could see the precise score of downvoted comments. (IIRC, a net score of -1 prevents a majority of HN readers from seeing the comment.)

reply

▲ detaro 14 hours ago [–]

? -1 score greys out a comment, nothing more

reply

▲ chrisweekly 11 hours ago [–]

Hmm, I seem to recall comments being entirely suppressed from view on reaching some threshold, thought it was -1...

reply

▲ dang 7 hours ago [–]

Definitely not. The only comments that are hidden by default are the [dead] ones, and anyone can see them by turning 'showdead' on in their profile. Outright deletion is possible, but only for a few hours, or if the author specifically asks us to later. There have been a handful of exceptions in obscure cases over the years, mostly for legal reasons.

Btw, for anyone who has trouble reading a faded comment, you can click on its timestamp to go to its page and the text should be readable.

reply

▲ artsyca 13 hours ago [–]

you see how much discussion is happening under a 0-point parent?

reply

▲ andreareina 12 hours ago [–]

I've seen some. Usually when the non-positive post is something substantive as opposed to a hot take.

reply

▲ globular-toast 10 hours ago [–]

Unfortunately you still get the [flag] abuse. It seems that some members are able to flag posts and you can often find if you say something disagreeable in a thread that every single one of your comments will get flagged regardless of the content of the comment in question. The comments can be well-written, non-confrontational and be a genuine attempt to start a discussion, but they'll get flagged because someone doesn't like what you wrote but (presumably) can't form an argument against it (like Paul Graham said, people only really hate things that could be true).

reply

▲ searchableguy 14 hours ago [–]

I self censor for a different reason. What if someone decides to find that one political comment I made few years ago after I am back on my legs again to drown me?

What I have learned from struggling a lot with issues normal people don't face (at least going by majority) is that we are all toxic to each other. Some things are more visible and easily understandable for others while many aren't. It may feel pretty shitty for a disabled person inside a room of normal people complaining about very trivial things and calling for others to become disabled as a joke. Some autism jokes may actually invoke sad memories for others. But there are groups of young people who do all those and don't think it is toxic. Joking about depression is another. There are many examples where line of toxicity isn't so visible for a specific majority.

People have difficulty imagining the scale of time and when that difficulty helps them form a tribalistic decision to justify their own biases, it's much more easier to do that than fight against the urge.

The rise of short attention span only means people are much less empathetic than they seem to think they are by social media.

It's only my opinion but an empathetic person will look beyond that this person has some horrible political opinions and I want to run a witch hunt. A tweet out of 20k tweets in isolation doesn't say much about the person especially if it's old. They might be having a bad day, may want attention and said something controversial to get it. Maybe they do have medical problems (I know I do, I am on meds and my behavior changes a lot). And even if that person is officially shitty, I don't see why would you try to burn their house. It's ok to inform others but what's the point of attacking someone that they think "nobody" cares about them?

If nobody cares about improving those people, then they might as well become too extreme in their opinion. If nobody wants to hear them, they might as well be racist. We all strive for connection and the reason why we don't want discrimination to exist is we don't want to lose our ability to interact with people we care about. If all racists can get are other racist people or no one, why would they change?

Side note, most if not all outrage on social media (esp twitter and youtube) seems to be created by sufficiently motivated individuals. It's as obvious as a bright sky. So I wonder if you can live sharing your opinions while not getting bad side on one of those twitter mob groups.

reply

▲ dlkf 14 hours ago [–]

This feels like an instance of negativity-bias. If you're willing to self-censor to avoid downvotes shouldn't you also be willing to shill / virtue signal for upvotes?

My problem with downvotes isn't the effect on my score. It's the fact that the font becomes paler. Dissenting opinions are singled out in a way that makes them look bad/wrong. I also don't like how the UX doesn't represent the distribution. A post with no votes will look like a post with 50 upvotes and 50 downvotes.

I am fine with downvotes, and with *some* UX mechanism to let people know that a post is being downvoted. But I think the current UX engenders groupthink.

reply

skinnymuch 14 hours ago [–]

What about if you have say 7 downvoted comments in a row, you might be shadowbanned [forever]?

That seems much worse. As well as not being transparent at all.

reply

artsyca 13 hours ago [–]

Is that true? I've gotten hella downvotes but still not shadow banned. I think it's because people read my comments in their own voice rather than in my voice and take offence to the words whereas it's just a way of communicating using signals in order to point to an underlying meaning

reply

enraged_camel 14 hours ago [–]

Yes, this is the worst aspect of HN's design in my opinion: the paler font is essentially the equivalent of silencing dissent.

What is worse, it is an entirely silent way of silencing dissent. I would love to experiment with the other end of the spectrum: not only should the number of downvotes be visible, downvoting someone should also require a reason to be given, in the form of a post. And it should be possible to downvote those reasons too, with the algorithm adjusting the original downvote's weight based on the score of the downvote reason.

reply

zozbot234 14 hours ago [–]

What if I told you that you can just click on the comment permlink, and that gets rid of the graying. Nobody's being "silenced" here; it's just a way to quickly assess the level of confidence in a HN comment.

reply

dlkf 11 hours ago [–]

Is it even a good measure though? Is the community more "confident" in a post that has 1 downvote than a post that has 50 upvotes and 52 downvotes?

reply

ryandrake 8 hours ago [–]

HN (and many, MANY other sites, including forums, product reviews, search engines) confuses "popularity" with "quality". If there was one thing on the Internet I could fix by waving a magic wand, it would be this idea that more people [liking|linking|upvoting] something means it is better. Crowdsourced curation doesn't work.

reply

artsyca 13 hours ago [–]

I've been saying that too, 'reason for downvote' or 'link to profile page'

reply

smsm42 7 hours ago [–]

There's a bit of a difference between "not saying things because you may lose a dozen of meaningless internet points" and "not saying things because you can have a mob of haters try to get you and you family fired, you life ruined and maybe send men with guns drawn to your home to get you murdered if they're lucky".

reply

ysavir 14 hours ago [–]

Why are you afraid of downvotes? There's little reason to self-censor due to an internet currency.

And I wouldn't say the forum is "exactly this" unless you're saying that downvotes are on par with getting "fired, ostracized, imprisoned, or killed."

reply

peroporque 12 hours ago [–]

If you get downvoted, you will be rate limited. So your ability to participate in the discussion will be limited.

reply

monkeycantype 2 hours ago [–]

This is a really interesting question. I know I - and most of us - seem to have a sensitivity to negative social responses, that it's own freestanding emotional response, it's not linked directly to any pragmatic connection to the consequences of that response. Which is why in a mass society, where that avoidance response is not well matched to consequences that sociopathy becomes a superpower.

I often find myself thinking that we either need to create a healthier mechanism for finer grained social consequences at a mass scale, or accept that the future belongs to sociopaths and cancel culture.

reply

blaser-waffle 13 hours ago [–]

Why do you care about invisible internet points? Create an alt-account and use it in good faith.

There is a chilling effect happening, and people need to be able to make unpopular arguments -- again, in good faith.

reply

commandlinefan 12 hours ago [–]

I don't care about invisible internet points, but people do get banned from here if they rock the boat too much.

reply

vb6sp6 4 hours ago [–]

Why do you care about fake internet points?

reply

▲ shinigami 15 hours ago [–]

Exactly, downvotes hurt so much!

reply

▲ projektfu 15 hours ago [–]

Honestly, I once got a gentle slap from dang, and it made me reevaluate my comment. Downvoting is easily ignored.

reply

▲ abacadaba 14 hours ago [–]

I find down votes are usually the posts I'm most proud of. Nothing crazy, just means I dared to have an opinion.

Also quite amusing what someone will take time out of their day to down vote sometimes.

reply

▲ celeritascelery 14 hours ago [–]

I had something similar. My comment actually had a lot of upvotes, but dang rebuked me for being inflammatory. Really made me rethink whether I am writing something to share knowledge or just to anger someone.

reply

▲ kofejnik 13 hours ago [–]

do you think dang himself is without bias?

reply

▲ searchableguy 12 hours ago [–]

No. But I *trust* that dang will roll out self references to his old comments circling in an infinite recursion to explain what he means when he is scolding. Most mods online don't even do that. He might be wrong sometimes as all humans will be but you can ask him to clarify.

He has to regularly see multiple sides of the site. HN is pretty diverse depending on what you click and as such, I do think he is *less* biased in some ways we are and more biased in others as he work as a mod for hn.

reply

▲ artsyca 13 hours ago [–]

Oh cm'on people are way too sensitive

reply

▲ dudul 14 hours ago [–]

Downvotes don't hurt, but I wonder how many people here would stick around if HN forced all users to use their real names. How many people would instantly self-censored or completely change the way they share opinion and respond.

reply

▲ Symmetry 14 hours ago [–]

A lot of us would. I figure that in 10 years clever AI systems will be pretty good at attaching pseudonymous accounts with lots of posts to real people. That's why I put my Github with my real name in my profile, to remind myself.

reply

▲ erik_seaberg 6 hours ago [–]

I use my real name and censor myself heavily. Pseudonymous speech is much more honest, but I'm not prepared to quietly defy a court order to protect a pseudonym from legal discovery if an employer gets sued. And now apparently journalists might attack your opsec…

reply

▲ throwaway4666 14 hours ago [–]

What's your point? 'Think before you speak' and 'speech has consequences' isn't exactly a new notion. Under a throwaway account on here I just write whatever pops up in my mind, when I co-author a paper under my and my colleague's real life names that's going to be read and cited, everyone triple checks everything so that as few innacurate or dumb things get published. How is this new or shocking in any way?

reply

▲ dudul 14 hours ago [–]

The thread of comments started with the mention of 2 papers discussing how people are reluctant to sharing their opinion because the "social cost" may be too high.

A reply comments on how HN is somewhat similar. People censoring themselves due to fear of being downvoted. I pointed out that IMO downvotes are a very mild sanction and truly, people don't need to censor themselves on HN, but the true cost would come if everyone had to comment with their real names.

Sorry it wasn't groundbreaking enough for you.

reply

▲ artsyca 13 hours ago [–]

Naw dude your point is not lost -- and all this discussion is happening on a zero-point comment mind you

reply

▲ ncallaway 10 hours ago [–]

I'd probably still be around!

reply

▲ peroporque 12 hours ago [–]

The way free speech in my country is being limited currently, I would not post anymore.

Maybe now it's still okay, but in ten years, who knows, I may be "cancelled".

Not that it hasn't already happened to others.

reply

Aeolun 14 hours ago [–]

I do this, but generally the comment wouldn’t have added much to the discussion in that case anyway.

reply

artsyca 13 hours ago [–]

Who actually knows? The whole reason we exist is to say or do that thing that would not be said or done if we hadn't been there to say or do it..

reply

aspenmayer 12 hours ago [–]

I don’t self-censor. I don’t really pay attention to votes except as a barometer for how HN interpreted the topic or content of my post or comment. I try to post within the guidelines and rules and generally not be divisive. And yet I often get a warning that I’m *posting too fast*. Seems like a form of HN’s invisible soft mod power that suppresses legitimate comments and posts. I know this because I tried to post something yesterday afternoon, got the *posting too fast* error, and now the post is made by someone else 12 hours ago or so. How can these kinds of casual censorship be quantified across HN? It’s hard to talk about that which you can’t say.

reply

globular-toast 14 hours ago [–]

That Paul Graham essay is fantastic. It really helps me to put into place things that I've been realising over time. For a long time I've had showdead enabled and I always go looking for the buried comments to see what I'm not allowed to say. I suggest everyone does.

reply

hejgkrorjjfk 14 hours ago [–]

From my observations nuclear energy is the holliest cow on HN.

Raising any sort of doubt regarding nuclear energy safety will quickly get you downvoted, flagged or banned:

Fukushima proved that nuclear energy is not that safe.

reply

antepodius 13 hours ago [–]

Really? I'm more pro-nuclear, and to me it seems like every time there's a post about it there's a pretty balanced argument in the comments about it. It's incendiary, yes, but the debate does happen, and the antis seem just as passionate as the pros.

reply

larrywright 12 hours ago [–]

Fukushima did not. Check out the Netflix documentary Inside Bill’s Brain. The last episode discusses nuclear tech, and was rather enlightening to me. Fukushima was discussed, and I learned a lot about why that happened.

reply

Matticus_Rex 6 hours ago [–]

I think it's less about "any sort of doubt" and more about the doubts that I actually see put forward, e.g. "Fukushima proved that nuclear energy is not that safe."

I'll downvote that not because it's a doubt about nuclear energy safety, but because it's a pretty bad assertion.

reply

mlcrypto 14 hours ago [–]

The silent majority!

reply

blaser-waffle 12 hours ago [–]

It may have been a conservative talking point back in the day, but that doesn't mean it's wrong. "Broken clocks, twice daily" etc.

reply

raxxorrax 14 hours ago [–]

This self censorship is most often meant when someone criticizes political correctness. It doesn't mean that you should unnecessarily put people off with inflammatory language. But I think it could still get you fired if posted on Twitter, at least a few years ago. Some people with especially large incomes seem to be immune though.

reply

yters 14 hours ago [–]

Hah, yes, like JK Rowling! If you are a self made billionaire, you are pretty immune from the twitter mobs, and can make controversial statements such as "there are only two genders."

reply

a9h74j 3 hours ago [–]

I question your use of quote marks there. AFAIK she is being much more precise in referring to biological sex.

reply

raxxorrax 14 hours ago [–]

It is a matter of definition and she is probably wrong if academic definitions apply, but yes, that is one prominent mob. There are others of course. If you think that these dissections were meant to free yourself from expectations, it is kind of ironic to have a twitter mob coming after you for wrong opinions. Completely defeats the purpose and then some.

reply

frogpelt 14 hours ago [–]

Ask yourself why is that opinion considered controversial?

Are you living in a bubble?

reply

yters 13 hours ago [–]

We are all living in a giant oxygen bubble!

reply

▲ nojs 15 hours ago [–]

Where can one go to learn these controversial truths? I would love to see a list of these facts that apparently only insiders can talk about. Are they literally so confronting/offensive that they don’t exist on the internet?

reply

▲ frogpelt 14 hours ago [–]

It's not the "truth" and the "facts" that people are afraid to discuss. It's their opinions about truth and facts.

When you see phrases like "wrong/right side of history" and you see things happening like mass cancellation of brands or people for their opinions, you are seeing it. When a police officer is immediately fired and then charged with murder for performing his job the way he was trained to do it, you are seeing people fear the mob more than they care about the truth.

JK Rowling and Terry Crews are two famous people that come to mind who recently stated unpopular opinions and were attacked by mobs of people. There was no desire on the part of the mob to look for logical reasons for someone to have a valid opinion that differs from the mainstream.

reply

▲ jkestner 13 hours ago [–]

Maybe we should find a more accurate alternative for “attacked by mobs of people” to avoid equating flamewars with, I don’t know, the Tulsa Massacre. We still need to have the capacity to describe the relative horror of that.

reply

▲ throwaway4666 14 hours ago [–]

I'm sorry, am I supposed to emphathize with a multimillionaire best-seller author who, instead of enjoying her wealth in some yacht somewhere (or whatever it is rich people do), decided to spend her free time riling up some trans people on twitter?

reply

▲ ja3k 13 hours ago [–]

It's fair to claim Rowling's opinions are bad and it's also fair to say she was dumb to express them. But it seems like a non sequitur to point those things out when someone produces her as an example of someone being attacked for expressing their controversial opinions.

If you want an example of a current person with a true belief that is not accepted by their society that seems by definition hard to produce. Especially to an anonymous member of the society.

reply

▲ finnthehuman 14 hours ago [–]

>Where can one go to learn these controversial truths?

Bits and pieces are strewn all over the place. But you have learn to separate the wheat from the chaff for yourself. Then you might start noticing the places with limited quantities of slightly more observant commentary.

>Are they literally so confronting/offensive that they don’t exist on the internet?

No, they just don't exist on the internet the same way most real conversations don't exist on the internet. The internet is great for information of the type that would be found in traditional publications, is of professional interest, or are marketing materials. It sucks for everything else.

People being real exist in very small quantities, usually on lighter topics to avoid exposing themselves, and are always outnumbered by people preforming for the audience or (untempered by people openly talking like reasonable people) have taken an extreme position on the topic.

reply

▲ wincy 13 hours ago [–]

The “Ben Shapiro DESTROYS liberal” videos that pop up on YouTube sometimes come to mind. Ben Shapiro was obviously a (probably very successful) high school debater and the guy thinks and responds fast. Not that those traits are good for actual discussion or coming to agreement.

He also claims him voicing his opinions about politics got him blacklisted from his dream job of being a Hollywood writer.

When he’s talking on a platform like Joe Rogan or having a leisurely chat he’s much more willing to be moderated by others opinions, and demonstrates the sort of give and take of a normal human being in a conversation. He’s certainly not some bastion of liberal values, and has principles he believes in, after all he’s an Orthodox Jew, but people like him exist because there’s a market for it and he’s carved out this public persona.

The people performing to the audience will get views from people like my uncle who just wants to see “Stephen Crowder OWNS libs” and has no interest in being right, only in feeling right. Unfortunately they’re going to likely always have the larger audience.

reply

▲ mooseburger 6 hours ago [–]

https://humanvarieties.org

reply

▲ bregma 14 hours ago [–]

There is a pizza restaurant in suburban Arlington, Virginia in which these truths are stored in a filing cabinet in the basement. Certain inner-circle members of those who know are familiar with its whereabouts and its indexing system.

reply

▲ A4ET8a8uTh0 14 hours ago [–]

I am going to respond with a paraphrasing of a well known quote about one such truth. The truth is that you are a slave in a prison without walls where prisoner never dreams of escaping.

They exist, but the woke crowd is purging them hard now. Any moment now I expect Columbus city to be renamed.

reply

▲ throwaway4666 14 hours ago [–]

We live in a prison because some folks are doing a historical reckoning about Columbus' past exactions?

reply

▲ contrapunter 14 hours ago [–]

>They exist, but the woke crowd is purging them hard now.

Yes, thereby creating *tomorrow's* woke crowd. Tomorrow's woke crowd will ultimately purge today's woke crowd. So we may as well just politely state our opinions because self-censoring and trying to be nice won't save us.

reply

A4ET8a8uTh0 13 hours ago [–]

But, and this is the important point, stating your opinion today may actually hurt you (job loss, public media shaming, loss of business) regardless on how politely it is stated.

In a sense, it is starting remind of me stories my parents told me of the old country during communist regime. Political jokes could and were reported by your friends. This could result in various social sanctions including 'wolf ticket' (effectively blacklist of dissidents) preventing you from getting a job, car, you name it.

Amusingly, today you find out, who your friends are by being unflinchigly open.

reply

goatinaboat 13 hours ago [–]

Any moment now I expect Columbus city to be renamed.

There’s a movement to have Yale renamed as it was named after a slave trader, not merely a slave owner. But so far Yale has managed to frame it as a troll

reply

selimthegrim 13 hours ago [–]

You’re leaving out the large scale drug dealing (opium wars)

reply

underwater 14 hours ago [–]

Paul's post has always felt like a wordy defense of the "well, actually".

Lots of us passionate techies like to weigh in on every topic and forget that not everything is academic. Sometimes the world doesn't need to hear our opinion. That doesn't mean we're being censored.

reply

mc32 14 hours ago [–]

Do you think regular people out there who are not experts in housing, policing, government, economics should remain silent and not express opinions on things they don’t have insight to?

Everyone has a right to express their opinion even on topics they are woefully unqualified for. Including clueless techies.

The only instance I agree is when celebrities spout opinions as fact (or promote a pet diet or cause) only because it could send millions of people on wild goose chases. That said it’s more of a wish and really not a desire to censor them.

reply

underwater 6 hours ago [–]

Usually those topics don't fall prey to moral policing.

An example might be someone arguing "trans women are not really women". If the question doesn't affect them personally, they're just pursuing what they see as a rational debate or stretching their mind. Their lives will not actually be affected by the exercise.

If you're a trans woman then that's an argument you've been exposed to hundreds of times and it's demeaning and emotional.

You can argue that you're just being rational. And you might ever change your mind! But it's a shitty thing to force that conversation on people when they're only the ones who have a stake in the outcome.

It's not censorship if you are choosing to hold your tongue out of consideration for others.

reply

jimbokun 12 hours ago [–]

> Sometimes the world doesn't need to hear our opinion. That doesn't mean we're being censored.

That...pretty much is being censored?

reply

cambalache 13 hours ago [–]

"Techies" are not academics in general.

reply

throwaway4666 15 hours ago [–]

Okay but what does this have to do with the thread? Scott isn't being silenced, he's shutting down his blog out of concern that his relationship with his patients may be jeopardized if they could look him up on the NYT. (Whether he's justified I'm not qualified to say as I'm not a psychiatrist.) What's the hidden truth, controversial opinion or super secret insight at stake here?

reply

strken 14 hours ago [–]

Scott's coronavirus articles were reliably ahead of the media. He was early with insights such as the insufficiencies of the flattening the curve model, the efficacy of masks, and warning it could become a pandemic.

These opinions are now mainstream. He gave them a platform earlier than the media did, because he was more open to being wrong and to exploring heterodox ideas, but also applied research and rigour when writing about them.

reply

throwaway4666 14 hours ago [–]

I don't get your point. People are going to roast Scott because he got things right about covid? What does this have to do with his relationship with his patients?

reply

strken 14 hours ago [–]

You asked which "hidden truth, controversial opinion or super secret insight [is] at stake". I gave some examples of what Scott got right to illustrate what's at stake if he's forced off the internet.

Can you explain a bit more about what you're asking for?

reply

throwawaylolx 14 hours ago [–]

The original post made an argument of the following form:

>People who could offer smart insights consor themselves for fear of being attacked for their opinions.

The user you're replying to asked what opinions is Scott risking to be attacked about. You're providing arguments about Scott having offered smart insights, which was not the part of the argument debated. The original post shifted the discussion from Scott's worries--which were chiefly related to the dangers of working in psychology--towards the more general discussion about censorship as it is talked about in the works referenced above.

In other words, most of this thread is repurposing Scott's post to give a platform for their current political concerns.

reply

themacguffinman 4 hours ago [–]

> The original post shifted the discussion from Scott's worries--which were chiefly related to the dangers of working in psychology--towards the more general discussion about censorship

If you read Scott's post, it says that blog readers have tried to get him fired and sent him death threats. That's already happened, before his anonymity is completely broken by the NYT. He's written on a variety of political topics, including feminism and racism, which are now self-censored as the blog has been taken down. Censorship is very much a feature of Scott's post.

reply

zozbot234 14 hours ago [–]

Plenty of people *were* attacked for their opinions on, e.g. the case for wearing masks, or the effectiveness of simple cloth coverings. Their opinions turned out to be correct. We can only know in retrospect what opinions will turn out to be controversial, so in effect you're asking for something impossible.

reply

throwaway4666 14 hours ago [–]

Okay so you're saying the NYT is silencing Scott by threatening to publish a hit piece about his early warning about covid? And if he didn't post that, his relationship with his patients wouldn't have been jeopardized by having his real name associated to his personal blog and he'd have kept it up? I'm not trying to strawman here, I'm genuinely attempting to connect the dots.

reply

chiyc 13 hours ago [–]

What I got from it is that any sort of publicity at this scale is potentially harmful to his position as a psychiatrist and person. Not necessarily that the things he said were particularly right, wrong, or controversial. And even though early warnings about COVID may not seem particularly controversial, the internet attracts and fosters all sorts of conspiracy theorists and fantastic ideas. Scott also mentions himself that he's had death threats, which adds to the risk of having his name associated with the blog.

reply

notStoicEnough 13 hours ago [–]

Maybe I'm missing some nuance to this line of questioning since I'm skimming too quickly for my own good...

But my read is that Scott is simply opposing the NYT's absolute policy of posting his real name in their article. His decision to delete the blog is because there were other non-coronavirus posts which he feared could lead to all kinds of IRL reprisals if his real name were to be known publicly.

Hence the repetition of "No doxing random bloggers for clicks". He seemed to be willing to bring everything back if that policy changes, and went so far as to ask people to mail the editor and be polite and specific about it.

Anyhow, apologies if I'm just restating the obvious here.

reply

dlkf 13 hours ago [–]

If you had bothered to read the article, you would see that Scott lists two reasons why he is shutting down the blog. The reason that you mentioned is one. The other reason is:

> The second reason is more prosaic: some people want to kill me or ruin my life, and I would prefer not to make it too easy. I've received various death threats. I had someone on an anti-psychiatry subreddit put out a bounty for any information that could take me down (the mods deleted the post quickly, which I am grateful for).

You write:

> What's the hidden truth, controversial opinion or super secret insight at stake here?

There is no one opinion at stake here. What is at stake is the ability to hold any dissenting opinion. Or not even hold it, but merely discuss it openly.

In the case of the anti-psychiatry lobby it's not even a *dissenting* opinion! It's basically the opinion that psychiatry ought to exist. There is just a small community of dissidents who disagree and want to get Scott fired (or worse). They now have a lot more leverage, because we've collectively decided that we should foster a culture where it's totally normal to try and get someone fired for things that are totally unrelated to work.

Just as the members of an anti-psychiatry subreddit should have a right to freedom of speech and association without the fear that their posts will get them fired (or worse), so should Scott.

reply

gringoDan 14 hours ago [–]

The point I was trying to make is tangential, but related to the post.

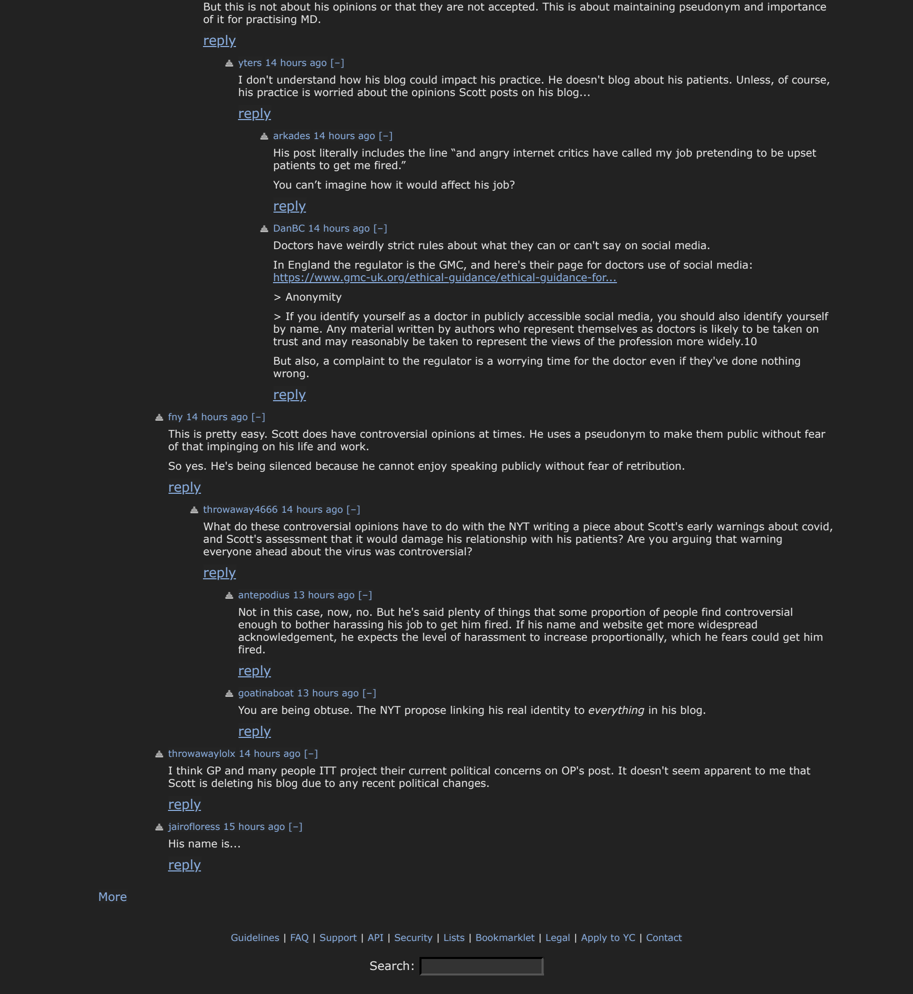
Scott has created one of the most thoughtful, level-headed, and interesting places on the internet. And yet he's shutting it down because it has led to a huge downside risk for his personal and professional life:

> I also worry that my clinic would decide I am more of a liability than an asset and let me go, which would leave hundreds of patients in a dangerous situation as we tried to transition their care.

What does this mean for others who want to start similar blogs or engage in these sorts of discussions? They're going to see this sort of thing happening and think: "Why bother? It's not worth the trouble."

reply

nabla9 14 hours ago [–]



But this is not about his opinions or that they are not accepted. This is about maintaining pseudonym and importance of it for practising MD.

reply

yters 14 hours ago [–]

I don't understand how his blog could impact his practice. He doesn't blog about his patients. Unless, of course, his practice is worried about the opinions Scott posts on his blog...

reply

arkades 14 hours ago [–]

His post literally includes the line “and angry internet critics have called my job pretending to be upset patients to get me fired.”

You can’t imagine how it would affect his job?

reply

DanBC 14 hours ago [–]

Doctors have weirdly strict rules about what they can or can't say on social media.

In England the regulator is the GMC, and here's their page for doctors use of social media: https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for...

> Anonymity

> If you identify yourself as a doctor in publicly accessible social media, you should also identify yourself by name. Any material written by authors who represent themselves as doctors is likely to be taken on trust and may reasonably be taken to represent the views of the profession more widely.10

But also, a complaint to the regulator is a worrying time for the doctor even if they've done nothing wrong.

reply

fny 14 hours ago [–]

This is pretty easy. Scott does have controversial opinions at times. He uses a pseudonym to make them public without fear of that impinging on his life and work.

So yes. He's being silenced because he cannot enjoy speaking publicly without fear of retribution.

reply

throwaway4666 14 hours ago [–]

What do these controversial opinions have to do with the NYT writing a piece about Scott's early warnings about covid, and Scott's assessment that it would damage his relationship with his patients? Are you arguing that warning everyone ahead about the virus was controversial?

reply

antepodius 13 hours ago [–]

Not in this case, now, no. But he's said plenty of things that some proportion of people find controversial enough to bother harassing his job to get him fired. If his name and website get more widespread acknowledgement, he expects the level of harassment to increase proportionally, which he fears could get him fired.

reply

goatinaboat 13 hours ago [–]

You are being obtuse. The NYT propose linking his real identity to *everything* in his blog.

reply

throwawaylolx 14 hours ago [–]

I think GP and many people ITT project their current political concerns on OP's post. It doesn't seem apparent to me that Scott is deleting his blog due to any recent political changes.

reply

jairofloress 15 hours ago [–]

His name is...

reply

More